

NEXUS

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NEXUS

1984-85

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*Winners in the Nexus Art/Photo contest: Gilbert Gonzalez, first place; Jack Crider, second place; Doug McNamee, third place.

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The Red Vineyard

Blue and white, the trees grapple
and crawl away on their black tangled trunks,
away and into the sky on the left side
of this image of an image
of a man's day humming with paint.
He stood here, and the sun fell wafer
white, ringed with rays of yellow heat—
between it and the trees
the air was spent, the sky exhausted,

so these women work in their old serious
haste, bent like twigs but solid in their
round bulk like rocks, under the musk of a horizon
brought close as a wall, the edge of earth
abrupt and frank. A wet road
with nowhere to go veers wildly right,
everything turns from sky, folded
back to burning ground. Burning?

Are the women entangled in flame? Or
is the sun, slanting off the yellow stalks
and leafy ground, turning the world red with light?
They might be splashing in streams of wine,
gathering a liquid fire from a strange fountain
without figure, honoring only the sun and earth.
Are they all drunk—is that why no one seems to move?
Only the fingers of this painter move, spreading
a bright intoxicant, or the wine of his eye
flashing from woman to ground to sky,
while a blue wagon stands rooted
in the center ground, with a blue horse
like a statue of a god, waiting to take no one anywhere.

Spring on the Square

The busy bus heaves to the curb
for a slight pause, letting
the people out, then churns on
into the wires and blue roads
like a deftly quick nurse. Left

to the square in their own healing
pause, the passengers look
up and down the anonymous glass
and steel walls, as if this were not
where they wanted to be at all.

The beeping blurs weave and screech,
pigeons flutter like detached
grey leaves swirled into the air
and back to the ground, that isn't
ground but white block and red brick.

Square on square divides the sky,
and a person walking vanishes
into the persons walking, walking,
while the white capped waves of cups
and papers flash on the windy surface.

Suburban Spring

The delicate grass and tough trees
unwind in a setting more playground
than lawn; kids, like spring bucks
mindlessly destructive, expand
in their becoming to capture
the bright thing that can't flee.
One comes to the door with a sprig
like a limb of blooming apple, sputtering
"smell!", waves it like a wand—
and he's gone, a squat messenger
from a place we barely remember.
Did other years open like this
with an orchestra of hoots and shouts,
peeled bark, flung boughs of buds,
and a final flop on the injured ground?
He digs his bare toes in the loam
while she squeals over him
"I am Michael Jackson! Run!"

In the Mountains

The diligent care of looking close
snaps from post to post, and the wrinkled
lake rises with the gesture in the trees
as if something entirely unnatural
flexed under the typical scene. The little lake
and blue trees, the rock and boulder tangle
under a brush of spent pines torn raw
by a winter that inhabits summer, then far
peak less a peak than human shoulder—
the touristy inclination to make everything
just like home. Everyone else is gone.
I lie in the sun, dreaming
of a Cadillac with a yellow horn.

Lewis Ashman is a philosophy major at Wright State, and the first place winner for poetry in the 1984-85 Nexus Art/Writing Contest. His poetry has appeared in several little magazines.



Shadow Play

by

Tim
Waggoner

Isaac rose from his chair and turned off the desk lamp. He crossed over to the monitor, a television screen set in plastic, and began replacing the circuit board he had just finished repairing. He worked in near darkness, having forgotten, or chosen not to turn on the lab lights. His sole illumination came from a small portable work light next to the monitor, which Isaac angled so its subdued light wouldn't annoy his eyes.

While he worked, returning metal to metal, the lab lights came on. Isaac didn't so much as blink as light flooded the room. It merely meant that the calm, quiet peace of early morning, or late night, had given way to six o'clock. It was time to go to work which was convenient for Isaac because he was already there. He continued working on the monitor.

"Pull another all-nighter, Isaac?"

Isaac still didn't tear himself away from the monitor, but he acknowledged his friend's words with a slight smile.

"Yeah," said Isaac, "Hell of a way for an old man to treat himself, huh?"

"Oh, I don't know about that." Paul removed his heavy winter coat, shook off the droplets of melted snow, and hung it on the coatrack in the corner.

"Seems to me you're more than healthy enough." Paul unwound the wool scarf from around his neck. "Take me for example." Paul hung the scarf over his coat. "I drink too much, smoke too much, and don't screw enough. I'll never live to see forty!"

Isaac chuckled. "In that case, let me assure you no one'll miss you."

Paul sniffed to keep mucus from running down his nose. "Thanks a whole helluva lot. You got the monitor repaired?" Paul wandered over to peer over Isaac's shoulder. "Jesus Christ, that thing was in a hundred pieces last night! Since when did you become a miracle worker?"

"What do you mean, become?" said Isaac. "Always have been. It's in the blood. . . Moses, Einstein, Groucho Marx. . ."

"You jews are all alike," said Paul. "You're fantastically intelligent."

"What's this I hear," said Isaac, "Reverse Prejudice?"

Paul went over to the counter and hunted for the coffee jar. "It's a Wednesday. Take what you can get." Paul poured several scoops of grounds into a paper filter. He fitted the filter into the coffee maker and turned it on.

Isaac replaced the rear panel on the monitor and screwed it shut. He then busied himself with running a check on the monitor. He turned it on and was rewarded with a slight power-hum. He brought over the keyboard and hooked it up to the screen.

"What are you doing?" asked Paul.

Isaac's fingers danced across the keyboard. "Keying in Test Sequence A." Isaac watched as the screen flickered to visual life. Black and white images, indistinct as the monitor warmed, oozed across the screen.

Isaac wished they had had enough money left to outfit the monitor with color, but they hadn't. The cost would've been astronomical, and Ferguson had no intention of giving a research project more money than it needed to produce concrete, objective, black and white results. But Isaac still longed for color.

Finally the images on the screen resolved into a focused picture. A tiny man worked on a tiny machine, while a second tiny man hung up his tiny coat. Isaac pushed a button and the test sequence was ended.

"How's she doing?" asked Paul. The coffee maker sputted and hissed, making more noise than coffee.

"Fine," answered Isaac. "I think the brightness is a little off, though."

Paul brought Isaac a cup of coffee and handed it to the older man. "If that's all we have to worry about, Isaac, we're ridin' high!"

Isaac sipped at his coffee and grimaced. Too strong. "Where's Eileen?" asked Isaac.

Paul chuckled. "Today's her turn to give the monthly progress report, remember? Ferguson's probably tearing her to shreds right now."

"Better her than me." Isaac got up from the table where the monitor sat, and stretched, his bones protested with sharp, popping sounds. "I've put in my time arguing with Ferguson for money, begging him for extensions, trying to make a minor revelation look like a major breakthrough. I tell you, Paul, there is no dirtier job than having to screw the boss through a bunch of charts and figures!" Isaac steeled himself and took a large gulp of the ink in his coffee cup.

"She should be down in a couple of hours," said Paul. "If all goes well," he added. Maybe their grant didn't ride on this presentation, but then again, maybe it did.

"Well, what's on the old agenda today, Isaac?"

"We still have what's left of yesterday's load. It's not much, and if we can get it done this morning, we can be back on schedule by quitting time."

"Where'd we leave off?" Paul downed the rest of his coffee and headed back for more. "I remember now. We'd just gotten the monitor focused in on a scene of Nineteenth Century London, when it shorted." Paul poured himself another cup. "Ever find out what caused it?"

"Yep," said Isaac. "It's the power requirements again. The damn thing needs so much power just to get a picture that it overheats and fuses the circuitry!"

Paul went over and sat down in front of the monitor. "You mean you fried it when you boosted the power levels yesterday?"

"We were losing the picture," Isaac said, a touch of defiance in his voice.

"Yeah, I know," said Paul. "And we can't get anywhere till we solve the power problem."

Isaac grinned. "Let's hope that Eileen is telling Ferguson about our successes, not our failures!"

Paul took another sip of coffee as he began to program the monitor. "If she does that, we're fired."

She'd better lie."

A few hours later, a rusty haired woman with just a few more pounds on her than she needed came into the lab. Her expression would've brought down even the perkier cheerleader.

Isaac rushed over to her. "How did it go? As if your face doesn't tell me."

"Shitty," said Eileen. She poured herself a cup of coffee and lit a cigarette. "The bastard spent the whole time showing me charts concerning cash flow and profit margins, and talking about how our work isn't contributing!" Eileen pulled smoke into her lungs and expelled it violently.

"But what's the final word?" asked Paul.

"The truth?" said Eileen. "The final word is two weeks, then we shut down, while Ferguson does some feasibility studies. Dumbass bastard! We're onto an incredible breakthrough in temporal science, and the man's too much of a putz to see it!"

"I can see where he's coming from, though," said Paul. "I mean, how impressive is a time monitor that can barely hold a picture? Sure, we're scientists and we understand what it means, because we know what it will mean someday. Ferguson's an administrator. He left science behind a long time ago to push paper. He doesn't want promises and hopes based on tentative hypotheses. He wants results; facts, figures, concrete verification." Paul grinned. "And yes, he is a putz."

Isaac sat, drumming his fingers on a table. "Paul's right about one thing. A time monitor really isn't that impressive." A gleam came into Isaac's eyes and years fell away from his face. "If Ferguson wants impressive, then he'll get impressive!"

Isaac worked day and night for the next thirteen days. His co-workers were convinced that he'd gone insane. When Isaac's work began to take shape in the lab, Paul and Eileen were doubly sure that Isaac had checked out and without his baggage. By the end of the first week, the small time monitor was hooked up to a massive computer Isaac had scrounged from another project upstairs. FutureTech may have been tight, but that didn't necessarily mean its employees were. Some of them still believed in FutureTech's professed goals of testing and refining new areas of science no matter what the administration, meaning Ferguson, thought. Isaac received a lot of equipment from other employees who sympathized with his team and their plight. By the end of the second week, a huge white screen over seven feet tall was hooked up to the monitor.

It was nearly quitting time when Isaac finished feeding the last program into the computer. His co-workers stood around anxiously.

"Well," said Paul, "you've been secretive about this for two weeks! Eileen and I've worked on various projects you assigned us, without really knowing just what the hell we were doing. Tomorrow morning Ferguson is going to come down here to see what we've done, and quite frankly Isaac, I haven't the slightest idea what we have done!"

Eileen nodded in agreement and smiled at Isaac. "Please?" she asked.

Isaac laughed, a rich, full laugh. "Okay, okay, you kids have talked me into it!" He turned to Paul. "Turn on the monitor, will you?" Paul rushed over and did as Isaac asked. Isaac himself flicked a switch on the massive computer that linked the monitor to whatever the seven foot white screen was.

On the monitor, a picture appeared. It was still in black and white, much to Isaac's chagrin. The set-up hummed with power and there seemed to be a soft whine coming from somewhere. On the monitor, a city street was busy enduring the footsteps of several hundred pedestrians. They were all dressed in the out-dated fashions of the 1940's.

Eileen exclaimed, "Isaac, that's the clearest, strongest picture yet! Don't tell me you've perfected the monitor!"

Isaac chuckled. "Not only perfected, Eileen, but added to." Isaac pointed to the huge screen. "Observe."

The screen's white gave way to grey. The grey faded to be replaced with a scene of a city street. The same scene that was on the monitor.

Paul laughed. "I thought the reason you had me working on that big screen was to enlarge the monitor! I must admit, Isaac, it's a lot more impressive than the little one!"

Isaac shook his head in mock indignation. "Lord, why have you surrounded me with idiots?" He grinned and took a pen from his pocket. "Watch." Isaac flipped the pen towards the screen. It arced through the air, hit the surface of the screen with a sizzling sound, and was gone. In the picture on both screens, a pen landed in the middle of the street. There was a moment of stunned silence. Then Paul broke it.

"Holy shit, Isaac! This... this is incredible! You mean you've actually discovered a method of temporal transference!?"

Eileen joined in. "Tell me this is a joke, Isaac. I mean, I thought we were years away from this! Maybe even decades!"

Paul grinned. "Isaac, you're a genius, but there's a limit to how much even a genius can accomplish in two weeks. Give, how'd you do it?"

Isaac chuckled. "Okay, okay. It came to me after Eileen came back from that meeting with Ferguson. He was worried about the cost effectiveness of our project. That got me to thinking. The most expensive thing about our time monitor, and our biggest problem with it, was the amount of power needed to get a picture to last even several minutes. So I thought I'd be able to please Ferguson if I managed to come up with

an alternate, cheaper power source than electricity."

"So what did you use?" asked Eileen.

"Time," said Isaac. "The monitor now draws power from the temporal energy it monitors. Kind of like electrical feedback."

"But that doesn't explain the rest of this set-up!" insisted Eileen.

"I was getting to that. I was running some tests on the equipment after I finished modifying it. It seemed that as a result of my altering the monitor to run on temporal energy, a small warp in time was created. Not very big mind you, perhaps only a hundredth of an inch wide, and it only lasted for a split second, but the computer noticed it. So I got to thinking. If I increased the number and intensity of power cycles to the monitor and hooked it up to a bigger screen, one with a power field to hold and maintain the warp... " Isaac smiled. "Well, you can see what happened!"

Eileen kissed Isaac on the cheek. "You old goat! You're going to win a Nobel for this!"

Isaac shook his head. "We will. I didn't tell you all about this because I wasn't sure it was going to work, and I didn't want to raise everybody's hopes needlessly. Not with Ferguson breathing down our necks. But nevertheless, you both helped to design this, if only in pieces. This is as much your invention as it is mine. Maybe more."

Paul clapped Isaac on the back. "To hell with all this! Let's go somewhere and get drunk!"

Eileen took Isaac by the arm. "C'mon, handsome. I want to buy you a drink!" She winked broadly at him and they all laughed.

"I've got a few more things I want to do to the—what should I call it? Time window?—before tomorrow. Why don't you two go over to Flannigan's and I'll catch up with you in a little while."

There was much groaning and protesting, but Isaac was soon alone in the lab. With the time window.

He stared at it. His pen still lay on the city street. People walked over it, past it, on it, but none seemed to notice it. Isaac had observed this phenomenon before. The transition through the window was temporary. Whatever was sent through would return in due time, but for some strange reason, no one in the past ever noticed the objects from the future. Isaac had even sent fifty dollars once, just to see if someone would pick it up, but no one did. It returned to him untouched. This puzzled Isaac tremendously, and a puzzled scientist is a dangerous scientist.

Isaac stepped up to the large screen. The powerhum was still there. One step. One step more, and he'd be the first man through time. Isaac took that step. There was a sizzle, and he was gone.

The street scene the screens showed dissolved into static. If Isaac had been there to watch, he might have understood. He might've realized that his time window, which in a sense was nothing more than a blending of several types of energy, had only had inanimate objects sent through it before. If a living, breathing, organism went through it, what would the energy

within such an organism do to the carefully balanced matrix of the time window? Perhaps more importantly, what would such an upset matrix do to the being sent through it? The screens cleared. They showed a kitchen in a small, country house.

"Isaac! What are you doing?" Isaac almost failed to recognize the voice. It had been many years since he'd heard Yiddish. He looked up and saw his mother.

"Isaac, Isaac, Isaac. Have I done something so awful that you punish me so?" She reached down and picked up a small tin cup from where it had hit the floor. She placed the cup on the wooden table and mopped up the milk that had been in it moments earlier.

While his mother cleaned, Isaac realized he was in a chair of some sort. He attempted to get up. It was then, with an almost overwhelming sense of terror, that he realized he was in a high-chair.

His mother finished with the milk mess and laid the rag on the table. Quite against his will Isaac found himself crying. His mother leaned over him, sweet smelling and far younger than Isaac remembered her. Was she ever this young? A child, barely seventeen! Isaac's mind whirled. As amazing as it was to see his mother as a young girl, it was far more strange to find himself in the body of a baby! His cries increased. His mother pulled him out of the chair and held him. She whispered sweet words. She sang a bit. Slowly, Isaac's cries diminished. His eyelids began to waver, then to droop. They closed, and he slept.

In the lab, the picture of a woman holding a baby faded from the screens, to be replaced by a group of boys playing in the woods near a stream.

Isaac ran, legs pumping and heart racing. The breeze kissed his face and danced away. He laughed. Summer was a fine time of the year, and this summer was the finest Isaac had experienced in his nine years. In the back of young Isaac's mind, a sixty-three year old scientist marveled at how big and green the trees were. He tasted the air; pure and clean, a joy to breathe.

"Hey, Isaac, catch!" A ball hurtled towards Isaac. He reached out and snatched the ball from the air before it could hit him.

"Nice throw, Abraham!" he shouted to his friend. "See if you can get this one! Isaac hurled the ball with

all his might. It arced up, up, into the treetops, producing a shower of acorns and small branches. Abraham covered his eyes. Isaac laughed as the ball hit the ground next to Abraham's feet.

"No fair!" shouted David. Old Isaac's heart leapt when he saw David. The two of them had been inseparable when they were kids. Abraham was a good friend, but David was Isaac's best.

Young Isaac laughed. "I'm sorry, Abraham, David is right! Do you forgive me?"

In response, a small, tightly curled fist split Isaac's nose. Pain, blood, and tears mingled with a young boy's screams. Isaac began to feel faint. Just before he passed out, he thought that Abraham had always lacked a sense of humor.

Paul and Eileen had finished several pitchers of beer by the time they realized it was after ten. FutureTech locked up at nine. Isaac wasn't going to make it to Flannigan's.

"Still in that damn lab!" Eileen sighed. "The man's obsessed!"

Paul grinned. "He probably fell asleep while running some tests. We'll see him tomorrow." He sipped his beer. "Now what about us?"

Eileen grinned. "What about us?"

The scene shifted. On the screens now was a picture of an Isaac who was older than before, but still quite young. His mother stood next to him. They were on a ship, surrounded by other passengers.

Well, Isaac, what do you think of your new home?"

The brisk salt air was familiar after so many weeks of ship travel, but the glorious statue that rose before them was anything but routine.

"Is that her, Mamma?" asked Isaac.

"Isaac's mother grasped her son's hand tightly. "That is her, Isaac. Yes." A tear rolled down her cheek. Young Isaac wasn't sure why his mother was crying, but somewhere inside the little boy's head, an old man knew.

"I just wish your father could've seen her, Isaac. He worked so hard for this." Her tears came more freely now. Isaac began to cry as well. He cried for David, left across the sea, probably never to play with Isaac again. He even cried for Abraham. He wasn't such a bad sort really. But most of all, he cried for his father, who had

worked himself literally to death for his family. He was only a couple of months dead, but it already seemed like a lifetime to young Isaac. A lifetime. Isaac leaned against his mother and cried.

The screens, both little and big, now had the picture of an Isaac much older than the previous one cast upon them. He was a young man now, in his early twenties. He was dressed in a suit, and headed down the street in an obvious hurry.

He was late. Isaac swore under his breath and quickened his pace. He shouldn't have spent so much time in the lab with Professor Hensdorf. The man was just too fascinating! Although Isaac didn't necessarily agree with his ideas on an atomic bomb. Professor Hensdorf was positive that an atomic bomb wouldn't work, yet Isaac wasn't so sure. It was a matter of . . . Isaac cursed himself. He was doing it again! Leave college behind for a night, Isaac, he admonished himself. Think of who's waiting for you!

Isaac was so lost in himself that he ran right into her without even thinking. Isaac and his date hit the sidewalk in a tangle of limbs and shouts.

Anna looked up at him with her big, brown, eyes. Her face was stern. "Just what am I going to do with you, Isaac Jacobson?"

Isaac grinned and pulled a ring out of his coat pocket. "Marry me?"

The images kept changing. Isaac's and Anna's first time making love. Their first house. Isaac graduating college. Isaac going to fight overseas. Isaac coming home, to be presented with a son. Isaac going back to college and finally receiving his doctorate. His children, three by now, all growing up, all leaving home. One becoming a dentist, one a housewife. One dying in a car accident at the tender, young age of twenty-three. There isn't even enough left to bury. Isaac going to work for FutureTech. Anna becoming ill, shriveling in on herself as cancer devours her, body and soul. It rains during the funeral. Isaac thinking this is the first time he's seen his children, and his grandchildren, in months. Isaac finding succor in his work, staying up nights, working on his brainchild. Talking and drinking with co-workers/friends. Fights with Ferguson over funding. Months lost in designing his magnum opus, others helping him, providing the

vision and enthusiasm of youth he no longer can find in himself. Success! It works, better than expected. Isaac flips a pen into the time window in demonstration. His friends want to celebrate. He stays. He walks into the time window.

Isaac nearly fell out of the time window. Tears ran from his eyes, blurring his sight. He couldn't read the wall clock. He rubbed fiercely at them. When his eyes cleared, he couldn't believe what they told him. An hour. He had been gone an hour.

He sniffed. Tears rolled down his cheeks. Roughly an hour a minute. Must be a type of relative speed ratio of the past to the present. That was why he'd only been gone an hour. Inanimate objects took longer, but that was because they had nowhere to go. Which was why no one in the past had ever noticed them. They weren't really there. But a person was another story. A person had somewhere to go in time. Somewhere they had already been. Isaac began crying anew. He collapsed into a chair and, for the first time in weeks, slept.

He was awakened by Paul and Eileen at six the next morning. They asked what he had been doing all night, but Isaac didn't tell them. He wasn't quite up to it just yet. He made up a story about working all night, which in a manner of speaking, was true.

At six-thirty on the dot, James Ferguson walked into the lab. He was in his mid-forties and had a permanently sour expression on his face.

"Well, this is it," he said without so much as a hello. "It had better be good."

Isaac talked him through the whole set-up, putting special emphasis on the financial benefits FutureTech would reap from the time window. Archeologists, Sociologists, the Military; all would kill to have access to a time window. And then, Isaac let the bomb drop. He told Ferguson and his co-workers what had happened to him last night.

When he was done, Paul and Eileen stared at him in amazement. Ferguson merely frowned. "Do you mean to say you've invented a time machine that only sends people into their own pasts?" Ferguson's face began to redden. "How in the hell is that of any use? You wouldn't be able to send any research expeditions into the far past!" Ferguson shook his head. "I'm sorry, Isaac, but I'm afraid I'm going to have to terminate this project. What you've done is amazing, I'll grant you that, but of little practical use, I'm afraid. I'm sorry."

Isaac gritted his teeth. Ferguson wasn't sorry, and he knew it. Ferguson was standing right in front of the time window. Isaac pushed him through.

"What in the hell did you do that for?" shouted Paul.

Isaac pointed to the screens. "Watch," was all he said.

Eileen laughed.

Paul moaned. "We're gonna be fired!"

A montage of life flowed across the screens, both large and small, at high speed. Baby sleeping, boy playing, sickly, operations, too many, high school, beat up in the restroom, college, scholarships, degrees, master's, doctorate. Wife. Love. Divorce. Pain. No children. Lonely. Job. Administration. Cut funds, allot funds, oversee funds. Days, weeks, months, years.

Forty-five minutes later, Ferguson stumbled out of the time window. He was bawling like a baby. When he finally managed to speak, he said, "Take all the time you need, Isaac. You'll have all the money you need. I promise." Ferguson gripped Isaac by the arm tightly. "Thank you," he whispered. Ferguson left the

lab, still crying.

"What the hell was that all about?" asked Eileen.

Isaac grinned. "I have no idea." He reached into a desk drawer and pulled out a bottle of champagne he had hidden there. There were cries of delight from his friends, who rushed to get glasses. The bottle opened with a burst of foam and much laughter. Isaac poured.

When they all had drinks, Isaac spoke. "I have a toast." They raised their glasses. "To tomorrow, today, and yesterday." He grinned. "Especially yesterday."

Tim Waggoner is a Theatre Education major at Wright State, and he works as a tutor in the WSU Writing Lab. He is the second place winner for the short story in the 1984-85 Nexus Art/Writing Contest.



Joan F. Reder

The Babysitter

Betsy is asleep on the window seat
With a pillow of graham cracker crumbs,
Her cotton dress and tangled hair
Nudged by sweaty air.

Billy is outside
Kneeling on cement,
Scrambling an ant hill
With a kitchen spoon.

The babysitter applies
Celery green eyeshadow in the bathroom;
It forms a flour-like layer
On her eyelids.

Sand-coated,
Damp
Bathing suits droop from the plastic clothes line
In the basement.

Festive Occasion

When I first went to a carnival
My fingers were lost in my father's hand.

Surrounded by lights
Like a used car lot,
Rocking in the evening's breath,
The ground was decorated by cardboard cones
With tufts of salmon-pink hair.

Chameleons with string nooses around their necks,
Squirm,
As a man with liver-stained eyes gnaws a twig
And grounds a pointed boot into the dirt.

I cried when my candy apple
Stumbled from its stick
Rolled away
And mingled with dead goldfish.

Joan F. Reder is an MBA student at Wright State.

Phyllis

And The Long Road Swallows You Alive Anyway

The children sincerely believe
in destruction
and no one listens to the old stories
Hear no evil my head
is filled with crows
though sometimes a line comes through
Holy mother of the Muse
I insult you, I know,
with a mortal ear
not my fault my problem
my problem is a bleed through
of feeling too fast too fast
abstract withdraw de-
tach I am too busy
a busy woman
washes her clothespins in the spring
leaves no turn unstoned Wait
I'm not finished with Me a second
Oh no I
ricochet off light
roaring hush of wind wings wings?
and by God
I am rising

Kiernan

Amends#1

Master of electricity
my father wired lightning for heat.
I never knew the man
who worked all my waking hours
whose father was a tenant farmer
whose father was evicted
from a Virginia mountain.

According to my mother,
his people were backwoods and crazy,
screamin' Jesus in the dirt aisles.
Once when he was young, she said
he raised a chair high over his head
and swung it down hard on
the back of his father.
He was so terribly silent.

At sixty-five his face
has been aged by rebel cells.
He is notched and gnarled
as an old oak walking stick
carved by the hands
of a grandfather mountain man,
hound at his feet,
takin' it easy in the sun.

Though retired by the shop,
my father is still working.
He does not take survival lightly
and works hard washing dishes.
From the aisles as from the lines
with his hands he brings home bread.

Spring Lions

Across our placid street
the field is a purple mass—
felonious intrusion among
hybrid shoots, each
green blade fine-tuned.
I'm memory dancing tonight
to the low hum and growl
of our perfect lawns growing
yellow manes.
Lionservant sleeps in the sky,
stirs at the first note
of disorder—a song, long hidden,
misplaced and holy
like a drawerful of rosaries
drums low at the window
like heartbeat fortissimo
then high and peculiar—
helium laughter.
I open the window dancing,
pulse arpeggio
time for feeding.

Phyllis Kiernan is an English major at Wright State, and the second place winner for poetry in the 1984-85 Nexus Art/Writing Contest.



Nils R. Bull Young

Sarge

In the dark
 it was time for bed
 (and he'd been in bed all day)
 One last look at the news—it was safe
 to lay his million aggravations down
 by the billabong
 under the shade of the kulabar
 tree
 along with Eby and the rest
 of the 614th.

After all these years to sit silent
 in the darkness with the heat turned
 down,
 pulling the blankets up
 over his skinny ankles.
 Back on the troop train again
 Orders in manila envelopes
 Listening to the jungle noises
 —the squeak of his wife's wheelchair
 headed for the kitchen.

Yavapai Winter

Four o'clock in the morning
 he stands at the kitchen sink,
 looking out the window
 straight through his reflection
 in the louvered window glass.
 On the counter, the cacti
 are watching
 awaiting an unwary hand.

All his life he's tried to escape
 these prickly pieces of his Yavapai past,
 fuzzy little threatenings
 that followed him home
 to glower out the window
 with his reflection
 and sneer
 at the Ohio winter.

Nils R. Bull Young is a graduate of Wright State, now employed
 by WSU, and proprietor of the Five Drawer Press.

Mother Knows Best

by Pete Ficht

Billy fingered the neck of his guitar. Only half an hour till the show. He reached across the make-up table and scooped up a hand-full of unidentifiable pills. He blew on them, dispelling whatever dust may have settled on them and swallowed. He closed his eyes, sat back and waited for the fun to begin. This would bring him up to the appropriate level for entertaining twenty-thousand screaming teenagers, out of their minds on beer and reefer. He was having trouble getting to the usual plateau of mental numbness. Must be this damn costume, he thought. It had almost gotten out of hand. He had grown so much as an artist . . . well, maybe not as an artist, but as a performer. Actually, maybe as a *mannequin* for his upwardly-mobile thinking manager. He had come so far from just being another Springsteen clone, but he wasn't sure how he felt about his current outfit. His manager thought it was a killer, and he was probably right. Something about the way the tight pink satin pants and the large flowing orange blouse meshed. It almost caused retina burn. But, it *was* catchy. Then, there were the layers of make-up he was wearing. He looked like a bigger queen than Boy George. But, if Bert thought it was all right, then it was all right.

Where would he be now if Bert hadn't come along and discovered him pumping gas outside the recording studio? Probably just another working joe who played air-guitar along with the radio. No, he was happy the way he was—rich! His thoughts started drifting away as the drugs took hold. Oh, what a rush, he thought. He barely heard the knock at the door.

"Hello, Billy, it's your mother!"

What? thought Billy. This is really bizarre. He watched in amazement as his mother rushed into the room. Jesus, what a trip! She had a big bag with her, just like the ones she would bring him at his apartment

right after he moved out, bags full of food, vitamins and soap. This seemed so real, he thought.

"Well, Billy, aren't you even going to say hello to your mother?" said the strange apparition. "Billy? Did you hear me? Billy?"

This is really wild, thought Billy. Quite a trip. Well, I might as well humor myself. "Yeah, Mom, I hear you. It's nice to see you. You look nice."

"Thank you, Billy. Though I can't really say the same for you. First of all, this make-up is coming off," said his mother as she sat down next to him. The bag didn't hold food in it, but a large tub of cold cream. His mother had it out of the bag and on to his face before he could even think to protest. This is really getting out of hand!

"Mom—" Wait a minute, this isn't good, talking to hallucinations. It wasn't natural. But, he started thinking that maybe she wasn't really an illusion. Maybe, she was really there. He couldn't tell. He tried again. "Mom? Uh, I spent like two hours getting this make-up on. You're gonna ruin it."

"Shut up, Billy, you look like a gayboy. Now just sit still, I'll be done in a minute."

Wow. His mom had never said gayboy before. Maybe it was the drugs. Maybe—"Now, lets see." Billy's mother sat back and stared critically at her son's face. She leaned forward, picked up a piece of tissue, spat on it and rubbed something off the corner of his mouth. "There!"

"Aw, gee, Ma, did you have to spit on it? Yuck!" Wow, he thought. I sound like the Beaver! What was in those pills?

"Now. Take off those terrible pink pants. And the shirt. And all that leather. Your father can't even play golf anymore. People stare at him and say, 'Oh, there's the father of the famous freak.' Well, no more.

You're taking those clothes off right now and putting on this suit." She pulled a suit out of the bag. What the hell else is in there, he wondered. My diapers? My rattle? My long lost puppy? "This is the suit we got you for graduation. It's very nice."

"But, Mom, I'm thirty years old—"

"No buts, put it on." His make-up was totally gone. He was so stoned he couldn't even object when she pulled him up and started undressing him. Where was his bodyguard when he needed her?

As she struggled Billy into his suit, his mother lectured him. ". . . and no more with the crotch dancing. It's perverted. The girls in the church group are all talking about me behind my back. And, also, cut out that song about the sex fiend. It's disgusting."

"Aw, but Mom, that song is autobiographical! My fans want to hear it!"

"Fans, shmans. Read them this. This they'll really love." She handed Billy her Bible.

"A Bible. Wow." He looked at it in bewilderment.

"Yes, that's right. A Bible. Now go out there and be a clean-living young man like we brought you up to be." She stepped forward and gave him a peck on the cheek. "Make us proud, Billy. We love you."

"Love you too," mumbled Billy. He shuffled past her and picked up his mirrored guitar.

"You won't be needing that, dear. Here." She hand-

ed him an acoustic guitar with a picture of Donnie and Marie on it. "Now, go out there and knock 'em dead!" Billy started out the door. "And get a hair cut!" she called after him.

Billy walked down the hallway to the stage. This is so weird, he thought. But, maybe she's right. Maybe it is time for me to turn over a new leaf. I don't need all that stuff. My fans will love me anyway. It doesn't matter what I look like or how I act, they're here to hear me sing and play guitar. Maybe I'll play some hymns! Yeah! He walked out on to the stage.

Bert was amazed. It was the first time in his life he had seen anything like that. A gathering of twenty thousand people pulled together by one single thought, one single intention. He eyed the bloody pile on the stage. Oh, well, those guys are a dime a dozen. I'll just find somebody new. No problem.

He walked away from the massacre. He eyed a young man sweeping in the corner. "Hey kid! Come here."

Pete Ficht is a directing major in the Theatre Arts program at Wright State, and the third place winner for the short story in the 1984-85 Nexus Art/Writing Contest.





Nanette Sellards

Burnt Supper

Bare table with
empty plates
Babies wailing
crisp, hard meat
The clock ticking
minutes, hours
Table bare with
empty plates
She waited longer
in swollen liquid
The clock ticking
minutes, hours
Crib bars held the
fuzzy heads
silent, sleeping
She folded down the
covers slowly
in the dark
The clock ticking
minutes, hours
The door clicked
the key turned
in the dark
Silence
Footsteps dragging on
creaking steps
While pounding, pounding
in her heart
breathless
The clock read
three

The Old College Days

The days stretched before us
when we were college students
Lounging in the green park by the bell tower
Kicked out by the park patrol
Because of our lovemaking
We lay in your sheetless bed
Counting the 10 children we would conceive
Afraid someone would find us
huddled with our skin touching,
Now we have only two children
You play golf, I sweat and puff to
the black aerobics record
We lay together but not naked
The kids too curious and old
Now we dream of middle age
when we can rest
and not bite our fingernails
or worry about the yellow overdue slips
we receive in the mail
And can run through the house
naked and alone.

Sunday Morning 9:00 a.m.

The church not carpeted red or padded pews,
No shining bright paint or intricate stained glass
or lace, angelic choir
or little grey haired ladies with clanking rosary beads
no furs or silk suits or tall hats
No gold chalice or marble table
Just peeling paint,
Hard wooden pews, plain cross and plaid shirts,
tossled hair, hollow eyes, filmy glass
Singing off key barely heard,
The leaden cup on the bare table

Nanette Sellards is an English major at Wright State, and the third place winner for poetry in the 1984-85 Nexus Art/Writing Contest.

Hanging Laundry

1. There is order here.
2. Down the line I utilize space.
3. I have forgotten to breathe.
4. My grass blades strewn with invisible corpses.
5. You are gone. Your shirt is here.
6. A wasp sings at my knuckles.
7. That whip, whipping begins.
8. The baby, the geese scream,
9. Dragging my bedclothes across the lawn.

Temperance

The storm comes up suddenly, turning
the space between one tree and the next green.

Maggie doesn't notice the thunder
or is pretending it's the jets tearing the air.

She works at a dead hippopotamus—
splashing colored clay onto a bronze cat.

Its eyes are covered with soft brown
and she's encircled its chest with blue.

I've missed the mailman: my three pink
letters wait. I wait.

I have an urge, more than an urge to hang
the towels under the heavy raindrops.
You have forgotten your parka. We are both here,
hanging.

Kate

Transmigrations

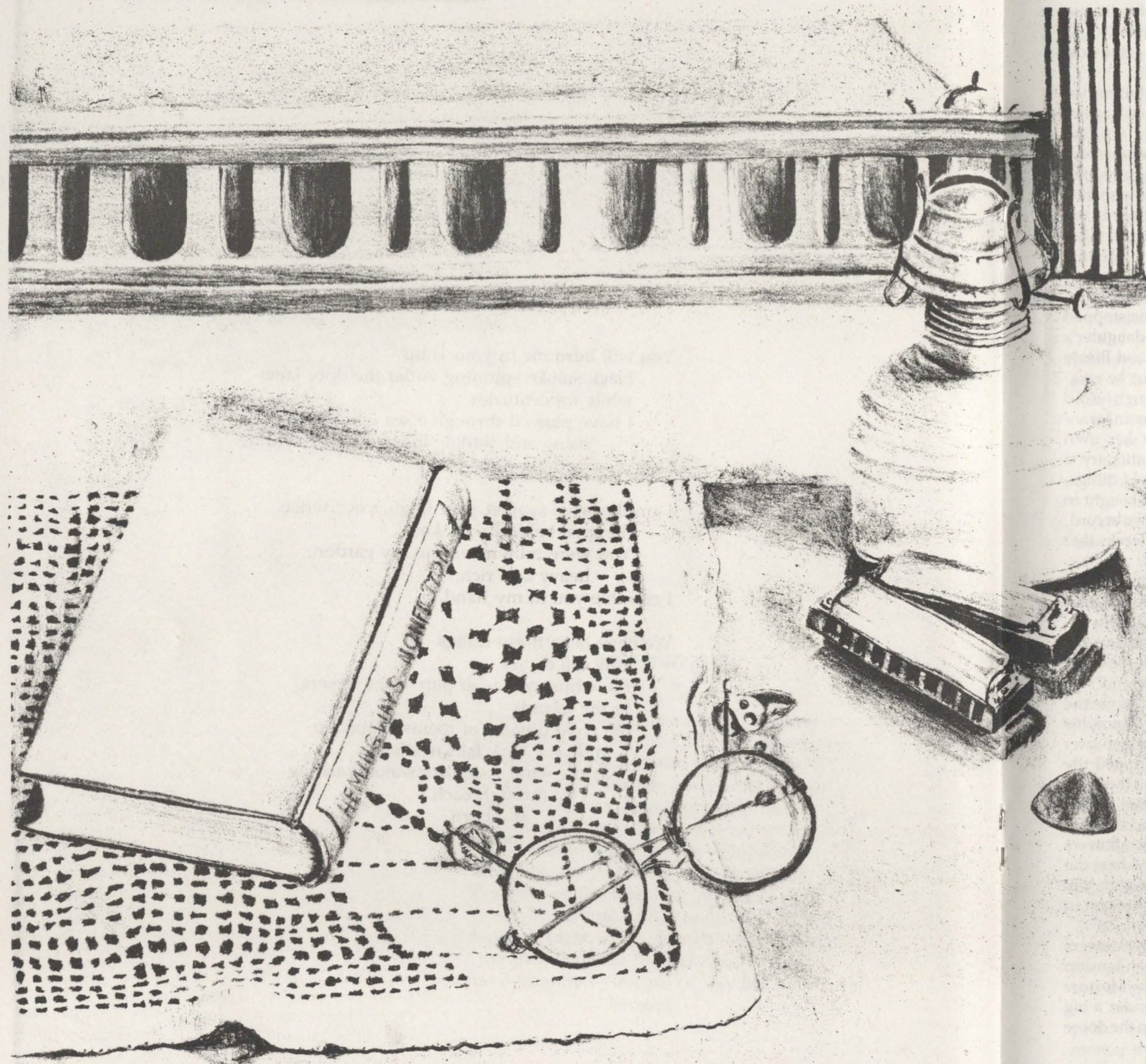
You will burn me in your lamp—
black smoke spinning under the door jamb
while for centuries
I have plowed through a sea of swallows
rising and settling in ripples to each side.
This is something done by me.

I am the wool against your thigh, your wrist;
the gnat behind your knee.
You were brown earth in my garden,
heavy and rich:
I crumble you in my hand.

We have been these things
and will be yet
the whine of a wolf pup in the desert.
In the Islands
the child dreams of rooms in rooms
and pine bark falls in silence
as the wind roars like water crashing
through each
stubborn
needle.

Hauck

Kate Hauck is a communication major at Wright State and a
tutor in the WSU Writing Lab.



Half Life

Douglas Hinkley

When his two children come home from school, Lark is sitting on the couch wrapped in a cotton blanket. Binzie takes one look at his face and says, "Mom's in a grump again."

"Yes," he says.

"Oh no," says Pete. His mouth turns down, a comic imitation of his mother's frown.

"Oh yeah," Lark says. "A big one this time." He looks at his children, from one to the other, and comes out with the news the way he has planned. "She tried to kill herself."

Binzie throws her book bag at the wall. "Shit!" she yells. She stamps the rug, a straw mat really, three times. "Shit! Shit! Shit!" The walls and shelves are sparsely covered. Nothing falls or breaks.

Lark spreads his arms, opening the blanket like wings. He wants to fold his children close, the male bird taking over for his wounded mate. Binzie comes to him and nestles under one arm, pulling the blanket around her. Pete looks at the spot where the book bag hit the wall.

"What's it mean?" he asks.

"We'll have to ask Mom," Lark says.

"No, no no," Pete says. "I mean what does 'she

tried to kill herself' mean."

"Oh shit!" Binzie says. She begins to cry, big sobs into Lark's chest. "God, you're dumb!" she says. "Lark, he's so dumb!"

"No he's not, honey. C'mon. He's six years old."

"Five," Pete says.

"Almost six," Lark says to Binzie. "You're twelve. That's a big difference."

"I know. But every time something important happens, we can't talk about it till *he* understands the words."

"That's family," says Pete.

"Right," says Lark, who was about to say the same thing.

Binzie pushes his arm out of the way and sits up. She makes a fist at Pete, holding it in front of her nose, a gesture she has been making for almost four years. As far as Lark knows, she has never slugged her brother hard.

"Yeah," she says. "But you aren't the only person in this family!"

"I know," Pete says.

"Damn it," Lark says, "can't we have this fight some other time?"

"That's what you always say," says Binzie.

"Is it?"

"Yes," Pete says. He runs to the couch and throws himself across Lark's legs. His head lands in Binzie's lap. She does not push him away but instead curls her legs under her and wraps herself in Lark's arm and the blanket. The blanket falls over Pete's head and shoulders.

"I'm sorry," Lark says. "But this fight goes on hold. Something more important's happened."

"You always say that too," says Binzie.

"Not always," Pete says.

"Sometimes. A lot."

Pete turns over and makes a tent of the blanket above his face. "A lot of times you say something more important is happened," he tells Lark.

"Something more important *has* happened," Lark says. "Your mother tried to kill herself."

He looks at his two kids. Curly, fair, plump Pete seems about to ask his question again. What's it mean? Lark puts his hand over Pete's mouth. Curly, olive, shapely Binzie might be about to state a fact: Mom is her *step*-mother. But she does not. She cradles Pete's head and cries into his hair.

Binzie gave up wondering where her real mother had got to long before Lark did. Without really looking for her, in fact, he still sees her at least once a week: going into or coming out of a shop, a movie, a restaurant; driving a car, even a truck; sitting on a bench. One day he drove down to Churchtown and knocked on a customer's door. She opened it.

"Lark?" she said.

"Donna?"

"No," the woman said. "Are you Lark's Wrecking

and Welding?"

"Yes, I am," he said. He showed her his license through the screen door. "Aren't you Donna?"

"I'm Angela," she said. "I called you to get my car started."

None of the women, probably, is Donna, but each of them has her hair. Before he met her, Lark had not seen hair like hers: not blond, not brown, not red, definitely not orange. Copper? The color was similar to a new penny's but any single strand against the light was colorless. Her hair was thick and she spent a lot of time caring for it, a lot of time and money in the Hair Care sections of drug and discount stores. After she left, Lark realized that Donna and her hair had a complex master-slave relationship.

He thinks that he still loves her, in a general sense. In the specific sense—as a wife, a mate—he stopped loving her shortly after she left. For their daughter's sake, he was sorry she was gone. Donna and Binzie had been fine as mother and daughter. But he reckoned that she had good reason to leave, though he did not know what it was. Another man? a woman? wanderlust? She left carefully, taking only her own things—clothes, makeup, shampoos, stationary a friend had given her; none of the household things, not even the expensive blow dryer she had bought to share with Binzie. Clearly she went of her own accord, but she left no note, and Lark worried for weeks that her body would turn up in a ditch.

About a year after she left, he was sitting at the table she had used for a desk. In front of him were two piles of bills, household and business. Donna had always paid the bills, and he remembered that the day she disappeared he had found them like this on the desk, the two piles. He looked out the window and saw what she must have seen when she sat and wrote the checks: a stretch of weedy yard, a rusty steel fence, his small junkyard of wrecks beyond. A day or two later he began to clean up the junkyard. He stripped the engines, radiators, starters, alternators and other useful parts, then gradually hauled off the steel bodies and sold the aluminum ones at a per-pound rate. He planted a vegetable garden in the yard, sunflowers along the fence, wildflowers and fruit trees where the cars had been. By the time Linda moved in with him and Binzie, the view out the window was pleasant in any season.

The view is still pleasant, except for the steel towers to the south. They are support for the high-tension wires that stop just before the horizon at the Morrow River, where nuclear fuel is to be made under a big dome. "Like a giant's hat," Binzie said when the dome first appeared.

The receptionist at Tecumseh Memorial Hospital is a paradox. Her face is a TV grandmother's, but she wears a blood red dress and her voice grates like a dull file on tin.

"He is too young," she says of Pete, who has rested his chin on the counter top to look at her. She turns on Binzie. "Are you fourteen?"

"Yes, ma'am," Binzie says.

"She's twelve," Lark and Pete say at the same time.

Binzie purses her lips as if she is tasting something sour. She is embarrassed for him, Lark guesses. She, at least, knows the ropes.

"They'll have to go to Children's Waiting," the woman says. She points to a dim corridor off the too-bright lobby. "They'll be supervised."

"We'd like to talk to the manager, please," Lark says, aware that the title is wrong. A few years ago he worked on the hospital Levy Committee. Another levy will be on the ballot in November. He might not vote for it.

"Pardon?"

"The manager. The director. The administrator. Whatever you call the person in charge." His voice is getting louder. He is beginning to make a scene. The kids move closer to him, lending support.

"Mr. Stone is our administrator."

"Great. We'd like to talk to him."

"You'll have to see his secretary."

"What for?"

"To make an appointment," the woman says.

"We don't want an appointment. We want to talk to him."

"He's busy."

"So am I," Lark says. He puts his hands on the kids' shoulders. "These are busy kids. Pete's missing *Mister Rogers* right now."

"I am?" Pete asks.

"I've got soccer practice in an hour," Binzie says.

"Right," says Lark. "We're all busy people." He raises his voice to include the men, women and children sitting in the lobby. "We're all busy people!"

"Please lower your voice," the woman says.

"I'll lower my voice when you get us the manager!" Lark is shouting, for the first time in years, he thinks. He sounds, to his own ear, as resonant as an operatic baritone.

"I'll see if he's available," the woman says.

"Thank you."

"Please have a seat."

"No thank you. We'll just stand here."

"Thank you," says Pete.

The woman picks up her telephone receiver and pushes two buttons. Down a corridor an electronic bell bongs twice.

"God, this kind of thing pisses me off," Lark whispers to the kids. "It's this kind of thing that made your mother try to kill herself."

"For sure," Binzie says.

They are partly right, he knows. Linda is often frustrated by carelessness, unhelpfulness, disguised as rules and regulations—no parking 2 to 4, two kinds of identification required, no refunds/exchanges only. The world outside their home is a labyrinth, all its channels blind. Often when she comes back from the

grocery, the bank, the shopping mall, her fair skin is gray-white with fatigue. "It's incredible!" she says. "It's just so damn unbelievable!" Though her arms shake with strain, she is unable to put down her purse, shopping bags, keys, gloves. He asks her what is incredible, unbelievable. "Carelessness," she says. "Uncaringness." Whose? what happened?

"Nothing," she says. "No one thing. You're just better equipped than I am. You deal better. I just get carried away."

"Let me deal then, if I deal better."

"Shit, Larkin. Are you going to deal with the mall?"

"No."

"Then who will?"

"I wouldn't go to the mall," he says.

"What about Binzie? Who's going to take her to the mall?"

"She can go with her friends, with their parents. I wouldn't."

"See what I mean?" she says. "You know your limits, anyway. You wouldn't go to the mall."

An elderly man has appeared on Pete's left. He is shorter than Binzie, bald, his shoulders stoop. He seems over-dressed for the warm fall day: wool trousers held up to his chest by suspenders, a thick flannel shirt, galoshes. His hands look crumpled, like smashed aluminum cans.

"I came for my shot," he says loudly.

"Outpatient clinic," the receptionist says, also loudly, her voice like a high-speed drill bit slipping on hard steel.

"Where?"

"Clinic!" the woman shouts. "Same as always!" She points down the corridor where she directed the kids.

He turns and bumps into Pete, who grabs his father's leg. The man looks down at the boy in disgust, then up at Lark.

"I got more plastic in me than a plastic factory," he says, not quite shouting. Lark draws his children close and looks away.

"You know what a surgeon charges these days?" the man asks the lobby at large. No one responds, though Lark senses the people behind him waiting for the answer. "Six hundred dollars an hour!" Tongues click, someone whistles. The noises sound mechanical. "It was worth it though. He kept me off dialysis!" He looks down at Pete. "I'm bionic," he says. "I'm permanent."

"What's di-al-sis?" Pete asks, but the man seems not to hear. He walks around them and down the dim corridor, his galoshes slapping and tinkling.

"Mr. Stone," the receptionist says. She is looking over Binzie's shoulder at a man in a pin-

striped suit, dark beige through light. He smooths his thin mustache with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand and offers Lark his right.

Stone is younger than Lark has expected, though he adjusts to his age quickly. More and more frequently the people in authority—the county bureaucrats, the store managers, bankers, police officers—turn out to be younger than he anticipates, not only younger than he is but younger-seeming. Last week he watched part of a television debate between the candidates for Congress from this district. The woman and man looked like children. They might have been mock debaters in Binzie's Social Studies class. He felt embarrassed for them, for their young voices so earnest about abortion, unemployment, defense spending.

Though he believes that children should discuss serious matters. He and Linda talk to Binzie and Pete about the issues that concern them. They talk about the threat of nuclear war, the destruction of the ozone, waste, poverty, starvation, violence. They talk a great deal about the dome at the river's edge, the sit-ins at its gate, why people are trying to get arrested, Linda included.

"These kids want to see their mother," Lark tells Stone.

"Yes?"

Lark looks at the receptionist's nameplate. It is partially obscured by Pete's head and he gently moves him to the side.

"Ms. Balentine says they're too young."

Stone glares at the woman, his nose reddening.

"She's in intensive," the woman says. She is almost gleeful, and Lark guesses that he and his kids have stepped into the kind of power struggle that he witnesses all the time—getting a title for an old car or a permit for a welding job, even buying a set of spark plugs. In-house battles, office grievances, the sources of which he can only guess.

"Let's go down here," Stone says. He ushers them through a swinging door into one of the dim corridors. Lark looks up and sees that each light fixture has only one fluorescent tube.

"Fine," Stone says, and the little group stops. "Mrs. Balentine. . . " he begins.

Lark interrupts. "It's all right," he says. "Can these kids see their mother?"

"Things are pretty rough up there," Stone says. "Pretty ugly." He lowers his voice. "You can imagine."

But the whole place is ugly, Lark thinks. Outside and in. The dark red bricks, the aluminum-frame windows, the front doors like a discount store's. The lobby's chrome and plastic. Now this dim corridor two shades of unnatural green.

"The kids are pretty tough," he says.

"I can see that," Stone says, which causes Lark to look at his children. Their toughness does not show. They are just kids, a little scared, Pete especially, while Binzie is more nervous. They are just kids who want to see their mother. Their mother and step-mother.

"They know she tried to kill herself," he says.

Stone's polish cracks. He has anticipated some easy, senseless cause for "intensive," Lark guesses—a car crash, a brutal robbery, a rape. What a world! he could say, shaking his head. Lark imagines Stone's mind running through a catalog of causes for suicide: wife abuse, drugs, a broken love affair, a parent's death, a child's. Nothing in his catalog applies to Linda.

"I'm sorry," Stone says finally.

"Thanks," Lark says. "Can we go up?"

"Yes. Sure." Stone puts his hand out to Binzie but does not touch her. "We'll just say you're fourteen," he says. Then to Pete: "And you pretend to be a baby in your father's arms."

"He does still nurse," Lark says.

Stone laughs as if Lark has made a joke. "Just take the elevator to the third floor," he says. "I'll call ahead." He hurries away.

"What's in-ten-sift?" Pete asks.

"She's in bad shape," says Binzie.

A tube protrudes from one nostril and another from a wrist, and they have exchanged her white-and-blue pajamas for a pale green hospital gown, but she looks much the same as when he found her. Her skin is still gray-white and waxy and her pale brown hair is hooked behind her ears. Her eyes are still closed, she is still unconscious.

She looks dead behind the pane of glass. She looked dead when he saw her on the couch through the window after he tried the front door and found it bolted from inside. He got in easily, through an unlatched window in Binzie's room, but then deciding what to do was not easy. Clearly she had tried to kill herself. An empty pill bottle, an old prescription of sleeping pills, was on the coffee table. But she was breathing and her pulse seemed steady.

He did not believe that she could explain something like this, or that she had to. Still, he looked for a note, sure that she would leave a message, a last wish. She would leave, at least, a hint to the puzzle, if nothing more than: I'm unhappy. Though he already knew that she was sometimes unhappy, and that it had little to do with him or Pete or Binzie. A note was in none of the usual places—taped to the refrigerator, pinned to the cork board in the kitchen, on the desk that had been Donna's and become hers. His anger was fiercer than when Donna had left without a word, and he decided not to let her die. He called the rescue squad, then he shook her and pressed her chest until they arrived. He stood back while they strapped her to a dolly and wheeled her out. Then he sat on the couch and waited for the kids to come home.

Binzie stands wrapped in his right arm. When he tightens his hold on her, she turns her face into his

shoulder and looks at Linda obliquely.

"Is she going to die?" she asks.

"I don't know," he says. "Maybe we should ask the doctor."

Pete, his face pressed against the glass, says, "Go to the source."

"Right," Lark says.

All three look around, as if expecting a doctor to be there, but none is in sight. They walk back to the nurses' station where two women in white are drinking Diet Pepsi from cans and talking. The women were talking when Lark and the kids walked out of the elevator. They did not look up.

The older of the nurses might be Lark's age. After several moments, she stops talking and says, "Yes sir?"

"Could you tell us Linda Miles' condition?" he asks.

She runs her finger along a cardboard chart in front of her. It is pink and blue and yellow. It looks like the strategy chart that a public relations firm created for a fundraising campaign that Lark was once, briefly, involved with.

"Is Mom going to die?" Pete asks the nurse.

She ignores him and looks at Lark. "Stable," she says.

"Could we see her doctor please?" he asks.

She grins without humor, then sighs. She leaves the station and goes into a room off the corridor. She comes back with another woman, the doctor, whose white smock is open at the waist. She wears studded black jeans that hug her hips as if they are painted on. Her hair is copper, cut in short ringlets all over her head. Lark wonders if she spends a lot of time on it.

"Yes?" the doctor says.

"We want to know if Linda's going to be all right," he says.

"Who?"

"Intensive three," the younger nurse says.

"She's fine," the doctor says. "No permanent damage. Physical, anyway. How many pills did she take?"

"I don't know," Lark says.

"Not many, anyway," says the doctor. "Two or three. Does she have trouble sleeping?"

"Sometimes."

"She sleeps a lot," Pete says. He closes his eyes and makes a snoring noise.

"Be quiet, Peter," Binzie says. "Stop it."

The doctor looks at the two children, then at Lark. "Did she want to kill herself?"

"I don't know," he says.

"Well, she couldn't have. She didn't take enough. The unit was free so I brought her up here. To keep an eye on her."

Behind her one of the nurses snorts. The doctor's shoulders go rigid but she does not turn around.

"She looks worse than she is," she says.

"All right," Lark says. "Thank you."

"I recommend counseling."

"All right. Thank you."

He shakes the doctor's hand and she walks away.

When her back is turned, the younger nurse makes a flouncing movement with her shoulders and head. Lark puts his arms around his children and leads them back toward Linda.

"She won't die," he says.

They watch her lie motionless for several minutes. "I guess she said she was going to do this," Binzie says.

"What do you mean?" Lark asks.

"I don't know. She just sort of said so. She said it was good practice for me when my mother left."

"What did she mean by that?"

"I don't know. She's wrong, though, because I don't remember much about it. I hardly remember my mother at all."

Lark is surprised at first. Then he realizes that he, too, remembers little about Donna—her hair, her relationship with her hair. Watching Linda, he thinks again that she looks dead. He imagines standing in a funeral home in front of her coffin, looking at her corpse, the three of them removed by more than a window's thickness from the spirit that animated her. But that will not happen. She wants to be cremated. So does he.

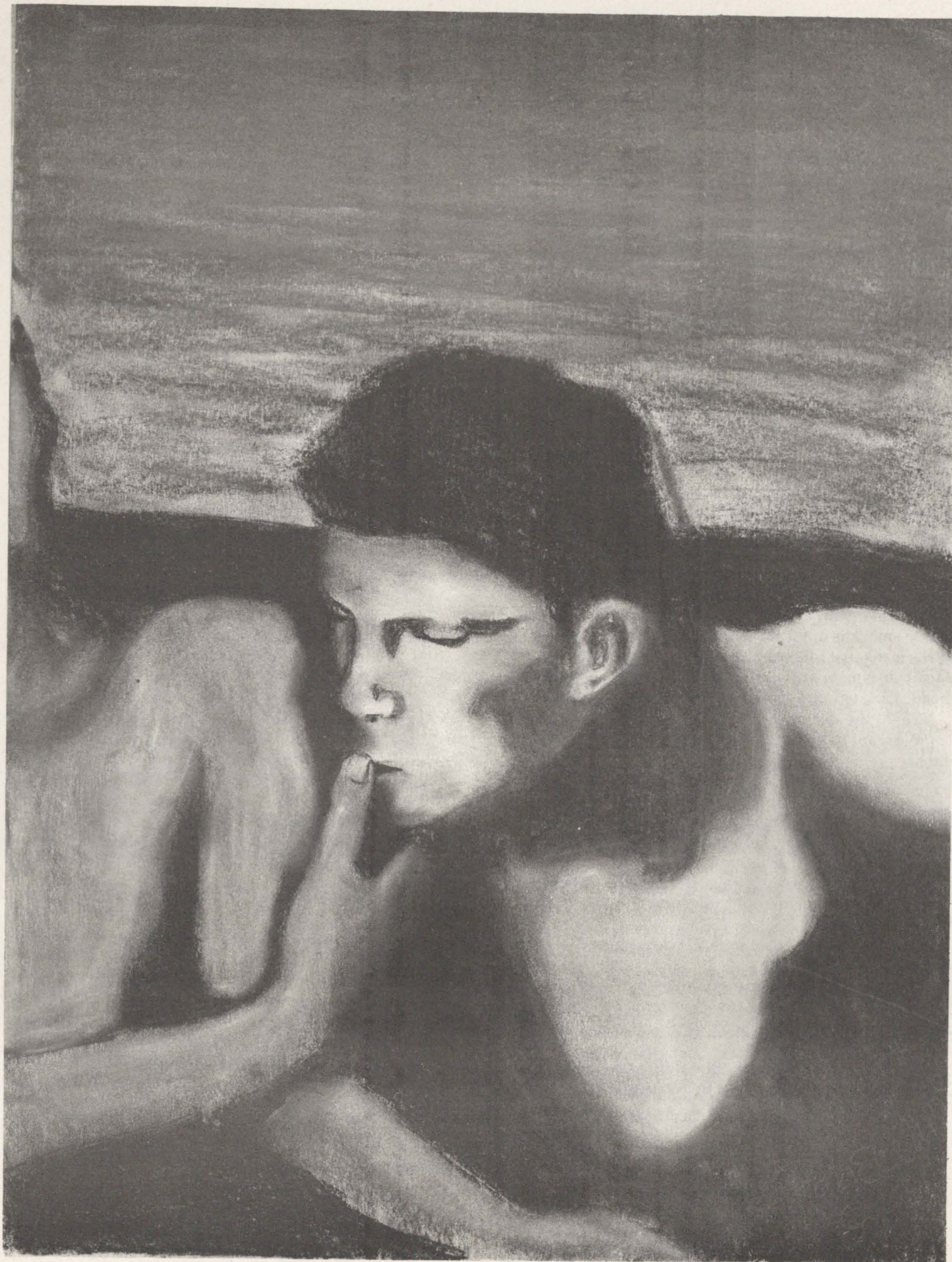
He tightens his arms around the kids. "Let's wait downstairs," he says. "Let's eat something. Maybe we can get her out of here soon."

"If she wants?" Binzie says.

"Right," he says. "It's up to her."

They walk to the elevator, where he tells Pete to push the button with the arrow pointed down. As they wait, one of the nurses noisily drains the last of her Pepsi and drops the can into a wastebasket. It clunks, then rattles. During the time he was clearing away his junk cars, Lark read that aluminum has a half-life of five hundred years. His ashes and Linda's, and Binzie's and Pete's, will be on the ocean's bottom by then, or drifting like the cinder of earth in deep space.

Douglas Hinkley is a graduate student in the Wright State Department of English, and the first place winner for the short story in the 1984-85 Nexus Art/Writing Contest.



Ted B.

by S.W. Bliss

He sits on the bed, talking
with family and friends who have come
to visit. He looks around
noticing the water pitcher is empty.

There are flowers on the overbed table,
not that he likes or enjoys them.
It just makes the sender feel better,
like paying respect for the dead.

He is not dead, yet. He knows
his time is approaching, but not today.
For now the headaches have subsided.
His daughter sits smiling, now knowing what to say.

Where is the nurse he wonders.
He presses the call button, asking for pain pills
and oh yes, more water.
Outside to the southwest clouds gather.

There begins a gentle tapping rain
till the pavement is covered.
Inside he is safe from the hazards.
Inside he is watered like a sick man.

After all, he is sick, of sorts. He can't
remember exactly what the doctor
has told him, but headaches remind him
that winter will probably not arrive.

S.W. Bliss is a registered nurse and lives in Dayton, Ohio.

Portrait in a Landscape

by Catherine Wilson Sayer

At first it was a Christmas card
all white with snowman stuff
waiting for mittened hands
and foraging furry things
no dirty brown tire tracks
or black ice-rocks
no shovel-raped driveways
not then.

But now—
a persistent cutting breath
has glazed the scene into a crust—
on top of a crust—on top of a crust.

The trees are staunch and tried.
They will not be hurt
by this hard season—

but I am just sitting in a car.

*Catherine Wilson Sayer is a Wright
State student.*



Suburban Saturday Night, 1950s Style

by Jonelle Kennel

When I was twelve I would make my way
from kitchen to living room
offering highballs to neighbors with apologies
for the scratched aluminum tumblers
which everyone knew we got from the milkman
with cottage cheese inside because they had them too.

Mary Jane would nod her thanks as she
shifted her weight from foot to foot.
Worn edges of Dr.Scholl's Zino Pads
curled around her sandal straps.
She'd listen to Doris, rigid as her pincurled hair,
punctuate angry sentences about
her mother-in-laws interference in
Timmy's potty training
with thrusts of her uptight breasts.

Joe would be dressed in madras Bermuda shorts
and boney knees, which bent alot when he laughed.
He'd take the beer I handed him but wouldn't notice,
as I hoped he would, that I poured it perfectly,
straightening the glass just in time
to form an inch of foam on top.
He'd be listening to different versions of
how to slay archenemy foxtails.

As the night progressed and I passed among them
their sentences ran together as if to produce one thought:
"The peeping Tom is someone who lives
in our neighborhood and who would go to Florida too
if you were the mother of six children under five."
I'd spend more time in the kitchen emptying glasses.
It didn't matter that what was in the bottoms
was diluted with melting ice cubes.

Jonelle Kennel is a Wright State student.

LEON AND FLO

(a comic tragedy)

by Rubin Battino
with Leon Holster

Editor's Note: The following is an excerpt from Rubin Battino's full length play, *Leon and Flo*.

(A living room in a Bronx apartment. An overstuffed sofa covered in a plastic protector is stage left. A coffee table is in front and a lamp table with lamp is at the stage center side of the sofa. On stage right are two arm chairs, one a recliner. A floor lamp is between them. China closet on left rear wall. Windows covered by drapes in center rear. Entrance is right rear with a chair and phone table near it. Downstage right is a door to the kitchen. Downstage left is a door to the amenities. About midstage left is a door to LEON and FLO's bedroom. She is a large matronly woman in her mid-fifties, one year younger than her husband. Present in the room are FLO, BENNY, JOAN, SONIA, SAMMY (to one side), and MALCOLM. This scene is after LEON'S funeral and these scenes are always set off with slightly subdued lighting and seven-day candles in glasses burning on a side table beneath a mirror covered with a white cloth.)

Malcolm: He taught us to love and be loved. In his own loud crazy open way, he taught us to love.

(Fairly long silence while everyone is occupied with his/her own thoughts.)

He made us laugh, too. He was so full of life.

(Long pause.)

That's what I remember the most. Loud. Life. He made us laugh and love. He might have been sick or down or anything, but people gave him energy. Laugh and love.

Sonia: He was so full of life. Like for him it was always spring, with buds waiting to burst.

Flo: It's my fault. I should have watched him more. Got him to lose weight.

Benny: Come on, Mom. Can you imagine Dad thin? I think that's where he got his energy. Always ready to burn up some excess fat.

Flo: Don't talk of your father that way.

Joan: I don't know. I like to think of him still here. Kind of a massive moving presence. All full of the joy of living. Did he ever get depressed? Scared? Just worry about things?

Flo: Just don't ask. Not now. Too soon. We should maybe have something to eat. I'm too tired. Sonia, can you get something? He always had food out.

Sonia: I remember. Like it was a commandment. Thou shalt never suffer a guest to go hungry.

Malcolm: Or unstuffed. God, he could push the food and drinks at you. I can still hear him. "Eat. Eat. You want it to go to waste?" He made us laugh.

Sonia: So, does anyone want anything? I can fix up some sandwiches.

Benny: Let it go for now, sis. There's plenty left from the caterers. I didn't think we'd have enough the way they kept coming and coming to pay their respects. But, they brought a lot of food, too. I'll have some fruit. Malcolm, you want anything?

Malcolm: No, not now. I think I'll have another drink. Sonia?

(She nods no.)

Flo: I miss him. It's so quiet here. He's here, but he's not here. You know what I mean? I can almost hear him in the next room, shouting. Why did I do it?

Benny: Stop, mom. I know what you mean. He's in the air.

Sammy: (From side of the stage where he is separated from the rest of the group who pay no attention to him.) I remember when I first met him. It was in this room. Sonia and I had been living together for a while. She arranged it. I was scared shitless. I didn't know what to expect from what Sonia told me. Half wildman, half bear, half saint. And nothing by halves. How long was that? Only about five years. In this very room.

Sonia: I remember.

Flo: Excuse me.

(She heads toward the bedroom while others exit.)

END OF ACT I SCENE I

(LEON is overweight, ruddy complexion, balding and rarely talks below a roar. As the lights come up he is onstage center and FLO is offstage in the bedroom.)

Leon: All right, already! So, you invited them. I don't have to like it.

Flo: (Offstage.) Of course you don't have to like it, but you agreed.

Leon: Sure, I agreed. With a gun in my back, what else could I do? But I don't have to like it, and I don't have to like that, whatever you call it, that she's living with.

Flo: You agreed. They're coming here. Be here in a few minutes. Let me hear you say you agreed. All right, honey?

Leon: (Going towards bedroom door and shouting.) Okay. I agreed. I agree, already. Stop being such a ball buster.

Flo: You know, I don't like that word, Leon. Why do you keep using it?

Leon: Because it's right. That's what you are sometimes. And you know what it's like to walk around with broken balls? They dangle and dingle and hang way down, almost to the floor. (Mimes walking around holding his broken balls while FLO looks on from the doorway.)

Flo: Cut it out, already. You'll hurt yourself walking around like that.

Leon: Okay. So, what else do you need to do? This isn't a bar mitzvah, for God's sake. What is it with all the dressing and cleaning and cooking?

Flo: It's my house. It should look nice. After all, it's Sonia's boyfriend who's coming to dinner.

Leon: You call that a boyfriend? They're living together, for God's sake! A boyfriend takes you home at night. Maybe a kiss or something. But they've got an apartment together. Tell me, do they have furniture or do they sleep on the floor, you know, like animals?

Flo: How would I know?

Leon: Don't start now. I know you've been to their apartment. There are things missing from here and either we've been robbed or that—that thing—has them in his apartment.

Flo: First of all, it's Sonia's apartment. He moved in with her.

Leon: Of course he did. You think he's a dummy. She's got a job. What does he have? Prospects!

A college boy. So when's he gonna graduate. Tell me that.

Flo: In June. Just a few months. He's almost done.

Leon: Done, he's not. He's still wet behind the ears. What he needs is finishing, and I can take care of that.

Flo: Don't start again. You agreed. Be a host.

Leon: A host I can be. But what do I say to that thing. Hello. How are you? How are you enjoying my daughter? Is she a good. . .

Flo: Leon! Don't you dare! I won't have you speaking like that.

Leon: So what's the matter with fucking? You don't like it anymore?

Flo: Leon!

Leon: Okay. Okay. So you don't like hugging and loving and S-E-X anymore? (Moving towards her.)

Flo: Leon! Not now. I've got to go to the bathroom. (Does so.)

Leon: Always to the bathroom. Always peeing. Maybe she should get that thing fixed. How's it going in there?

(For an answer, the door to the bathroom slams.)

So what else is new? How do these little things happen to me? My little girl. And she's living—living!—with that schlemiel. So, what's he studying, this college boy?

(Shouting at the bathroom door.)

What's he gonna be?

Flo: (Through the door.) History. He's got very good grades. A bright boy.

Leon: History! That's all I need yet. So, what's he going to do, sell history door-to-door? How's he gonna earn a living?

Flo: Ask him.

(Bell rings.)

Answer the door.

Leon: Are you coming out?

Flo: Soon. Give me a minute. Answer the door.

Leon: All right. Okay. She hides in the bathroom and I'm the schmo what opens the door. Okay, sonny, let's see what you're like.

(Mimes holding balls as he walks towards entrance door.)

END OF ACT I SCENE 2

Sonia: Hi, dad.

(Going to him at door and kissing him.)

(Softly.) This is Sammy. Now take it easy on him.

Leon: (Loudly.) Of course, I'll be easy on him. What do you think I am? An ignoramus? Hello, Sammy. Come in, come in. You can leave your coats here. It's okay. Flo. They're here. She's still on the pot. Can you imagine. I don't. . .

Sonia: Dad, stop it. Sammy doesn't want to hear.

Leon: What doesn't he want to hear? He's never gone potty? What is this? Here, let me ask him. Sammy, do you go to the bathroom?

Sammy: Well, I guess so, Mr. . . .

Leon: You guess what? Do you or don't you? I mean you have the opening, don't you? What do you do when it fills up?

Sonia: Dad! Please!

Leon: Did I ask a question? Let him answer. Well, Sammy, what do you do when you-know-what fills up?

Sammy: I used to go in my diapers, then my pants, then in a potty. Now I go to the bathroom like the big boys.

(Putting his hand out.)

Pleased to meet you, Mr. Lautenkrieg.

Leon: *(Looking at hand.)* Before I shake it, I want to know which hand you wipe with.

Sonia: Dad, stop it!

Sammy: It's okay, Sonia. I used to use my right hand. Now I use toilet paper.

Leon: *(Grabs hand in a powerful grip and shakes vigorously.)* Good. I was just checking. So come in, come in. Can I get you something to drink?

(To SONIA.)

He drinks, doesn't he?

Sonia: Yes, Dad. I'll get it. Do you still have that good wine I brought the last time?

Leon: Sure. It's in the cabinet. I'll get myself some Seagrams. Sit, sit, sonny. It's okay. You won't hurt the plastic.

Sammy: Thanks. Can I look around?

Leon: Sure. You want a tour? There's the kitchen. There's the bedroom. And over there is where we hide the potty.

(FLO emerges on this last line.)

Flo: Potty? What are you talking about? Hello, hello, Sammy.

(She goes over and kisses SAMMY's cheek while LEON glowers.)

Welcome to our home. Can I get you anything?

Sonia: Here. I've got the wine.

Sammy: Actually I'd like to wash my hands first.

(Heads towards bathroom.)

Leon: Did you spray a little bit. You know you always leave a big stink in there.

Flo: Leon! Stop it. I didn't. You know what I mean. Sammy. It's okay. Don't listen to him. Just go right ahead and wash up. It's okay.

(SAMMY goes to bathroom and closes door.)

Sonia: Dad, you could be nicer.

Flo: You certainly could. You promised.

Leon: What have I done? I'm polite. I let him come here, didn't I? They're living together and he's here in my house. So, what do you want from me? You want to bust another one?

Flo: Leon! Stop it. Just be nice. Be polite. That's all I ask.

Sonia: Please. This means a lot to me. We love each other.

Leon: So what else is new? Love. That's what it is. They look in each other's eyes and just jump into bed.

Don't look at me that way. They could wait, couldn't they? Like normal people. They don't have to be animals. Wait till they get married.

Sonia: People don't do that anymore. It's not necessary. Just a piece of paper. You're too old fashioned.

Flo: You are.

Leon: Old fashioned? *(To FLO.)* Don't you give it to me, too. Is it old fashioned to ask them to make it legal before they jump into bed? What if they had a baby, for God's sake? What would they do then? A bastard in my family. You can't do this to me.

Sonia: There'll be no bastards. Haven't you ever heard of the pill? Do you want me to draw pictures for you? How's dinner coming, Mom?

Flo: Come. You can help me in the kitchen.

(They leave.)

Leon: *(Muttering to himself.)* Old Fashioned. So that's what they think. Old fashioned I'm not. But it should be legal.

Sammy: *(Emerging from the bathroom.)* What should be legal, Mr. Lautenkrieg?

Leon: Legal should be legal. You want to live with Sonia, you should make it legal. What's so terrible about a wedding. My wife and me, soon it will be twenty-five years. So?

Sammy: We just don't do it that way anymore. It's not necessary.

Leon: So, tell me your intentions. They're honorable? You plan to get married? At least, maybe, you can plan to marry?

Sammy: Well, sure. We've talked about it. So what do you think about the Mets? Will they have a chance this year?

Leon: Not so fast. You do plan to get married some time? Maybe even to my Sonia?

Sammy: Sure. I do. We do. We've talked about it. But I'm still in school. Need to graduate first.

Leon: And in the meantime, you're living off Sonia. She works. You eat. What else do you do?

Sammy: Study. I study. I need to get good grades.

Leon: What are you gonna do with those grades? Become a doctor, maybe?

Sammy: No. No doctor. I'm majoring in history. I'm going to teach first. Maybe go for an advanced degree later.

Leon: What can you earn as a teacher? Be realistic. Do you know what those people earn?

Sammy: Yes. It's enough. We can get by on it. Besides, Sonia's going to keep on working.

Leon: Now, that I don't like. A husband should support a wife. Not the other way around. You can sleep with her, you can support her.

Sammy: Sure. Sure, Mr. Lautenkrieg. Don't worry. I'll take care of her. I love her.

Leon: Love isn't enough. The green stuff. You need the moolah. You understand? I don't want you to come running to me. You're old enough to climb into bed with my little girl, you're old enough to support her.

Sammy: So, what about the Mets? Think they'll make

it this year?

Leon: This year. Next year. Who knows? Just don't forget what I told you.

Sonia: *(Coming from kitchen.)* Here's the appetizer. Don't forget what?

Sammy: He wants me to make an honest woman out of you.

Sonia: I'm already honest. I don't lie, cheat, steal or chew gum. What more do you want, daddy-o?

Leon: Don't call me that. A little respect! So, when do we eat?

Flo: *(From kitchen.)* Soon. Start on the chopped liver. *(They all sit down. LEON is stage left, SAMMY facing downstage, and SONIA facing upstage.)*

Leon: My wife makes the best chopped liver in the world. Eat. You look a little skinny. You don't have any diseases, do you?

Sammy: No, Mr. Lautenkrieg. No diseases. Say, this is good.

(They all eat, LEON loading up and eating with loud noises.)

Leon: Flo? This is really good. Here. Have some more.

Sammy: No thanks. I'm saving room.

Sonia: I'm dieting.

Leon: Diet, schmiet. If you don't eat, you don't live. God forbid, you should have a wasting fever! A little fat protects you.

Flo: *(Coming in, laden with dishes.)* You. You're so protected it would take ten fevers! Maybe you should lose a little like the doctor's been telling you. It's not good for your heart. *(FLO sits down stage right)*

Leon: Heart, schmart. It's beating, isn't it? Hasn't missed a day yet. Like iron. Let's eat.

Sammy: The food is very good, Mrs. Lautenkrieg.

Flo: Thank you. Please have some more.

Sammy: Thank you. Just a little bit.

(At this point, LEON lets go with a really loud long rolling fart. Everyone is frozen in a tableau as LEON starts to eat again. On the second bite, he looks up.)

Leon: So, what's the matter with everyone. I have a little gas and it's like the end of the world. Eat. The food is getting cold.

Flo: How could you embarrass me this way? In front of guests?

Leon: What do you mean "guests"? It's only Sonia and her live-in boyfriend. What's the matter with you people?

Sonia: Dad, it's just not right. I'm going to leave. Sammy, let's go.

Leon: *(Reaching out holding them down.)* Now wait a minute. What's all the commotion? A little gas. It's a perfectly natural normal function. You eat, you breathe. Some comes out wet, some harder and some comes out as gas. You want, maybe, I should explode? You want, maybe, I should tilt myself a little in the chair and let out those quiet smelly ones like your mother's always doing? Eat. It'll get cold.

Flo: Leon, how could you? In front of the children.

Leon: Children, they're not. They're playing house

together. Do you call that children?

Sonia: Dad, stop it right now.

Flo: Stop it, Leon. Button up.

Leon: Button up? For a little gas? What's the world coming to? I ask you, Sammy, you've never had gas? Let one slip out, make a smell, make a nice big roar? Tell me, Sammy, are you a saint, too, or do you fart?

Sammy: Yes, Mr. Lautenkrieg, I do fart. And sometimes it sneaks out. Can I clear the table?

Leon: You didn't finish everything on your plate. You don't like brussel sprouts? Flo got them special. A treat. Make a nice meal for the live-in. Pardon me, the boyfriend.

Sammy: I don't like brussel sprouts.

Leon: Have you ever tried them?

Sonia: Dad, what is this?

Leon: Let him answer. Well?

Sammy: No.

Leon: You can live with my daughter, but you've never tasted brussel sprouts. Let me tell you about life, sonny, to live you have to taste everything . . . and smell everything. That way you know what to avoid. So, taste!

Sonia: Don't let him bully you.

Sammy: It's okay. Maybe he's right. Okay. I'll try it.

(Takes a bite, chews, swallows.)

That wasn't so bad. I'll have another.

Leon: See. He can learn. So, let's have some coffee.

(SONIA and FLO clear and disappear to the kitchen.)

Sammy: That wasn't half so bad.

Leon: Taste. Try new things. Ask when you don't know. That's living. So, when are you two getting married?

Sammy: That's really something for me and Sonia to decide. We haven't decided.

Leon: You're not such a bad boy. Maybe should eat a little more. History? You could make a living, maybe, teaching history?

(Lights fade as SAMMY slowly nods.)

Vance Wissinger Jr.

Was It Something I Said?

Screaming, you pick up
the typewriter. From across the fake
Persian rug, you give that Smith—
Corona a flying
lesson.

Before hitting the floor
that flying portable kisses the flickering
t.v. tube. The explosion
murders "All My Children", perforates
the air and your last
sheet of erasable typing
paper with shards of phosphored
glass, trips a circuit
breaker in that box
on the furnace room wall.

You tear the towel
off your fresh-showered
body to heave
the terrycloth down
at your painted toenails, forcing sibilant
breaths in, out, jaw muscles flexed
for self control.

In the window seat I
sip homemade wine, then
pan from your work to
the rejection slip held aloft
between my thumb
and forefinger.

I ponder making a
stand to offer comfort and join
you there in the cutting
litter. My bare feet ponder
also; becoming paranoid
for the sake of art.

Instruction In Chinese Water Torture

I live in a doll house
made of hardwoods and spider webs
with Mick Kennedy who had a knife fetish
when he was pong or thirteen years old.
Once he mailed away for a French Army
surplus machete that he stored under pong his bed.

Now Mick sits on the wooden arm chair
painted pong mustard orange but chipping
to show gloss black enamel
on the arms. It creaks pong
as Mick retrieves the silver tubed X-acto
knife he has dropped to the green
pong carpet where it sticks. And did not

quiver, or cleave even the smallest
wood shaving that pong decorates the kitchen
floor like bird droppings, while Mick
signatures the face of a Japanese pong woman
on what will be a woodblock. He
will entitle the piece pong, "The Summer of '45"
Mick tells me laughing there in front
of the crackling fire pong place.

The coppered bottom of the Revere pong Ware pot
winces upside down in the sink
at the thought of orientals.
And pong anticipates the impact
of the faucet drip again.

Vance Wissinger Jr. is a philosophy major at Wright State.



Today should be my last day of college. I mean my last day ever. If I had any integrity, I'd just quit right now. You can't learn anything around here.

I just got my third essay back today. What a joke. I'm in this supposedly Honors Composition class, and I've got this prof—Dr. Bloe—who probably couldn't write a clear, simple thought under threat of death. He lectures as if knowledge only exists if it is guarded and embedded in layers of bullshit, like rubies buried in stone. Not everything is hidden. The knowledge that he's a shmuck isn't buried very deep.

You should see this guy, Dr. Burton Bloe, in action. The first thing he does every class period is erase the board entirely. It takes him about six whole minutes. But he has never once even used the board. Never. And he even brings his own eraser and chalk with him. You figure it out. The next thing he does is set up the wooden lecturn. The first day I started checking

and my neat conclusion. He smiled and ripped up my paper. He actually tore it up. He said, "Let's see what you have to say now that you've gotten all the bullshit out. Try being honest this time." We got along great after that.

The other thing I learned was that you have to write about what you know and feel. And you have to write in your style, whatever it is, and not in someone else's. I can't write about social problems using the same style Swift uses. I don't know enough about social problems in the first place, and I've never been dry enough to go on about things as if I'm serious when I'm not. I talk too much to be a satirist. I'd give it away by saying something like, "I know it sounds sort of cruel about eating all the black babies, but I'm trying to make a point about blah, blah, blah, so please bear with me. . ."

Now before I go on to tell you about this last essay

wasn't my idea to read this subversive essay in the first place. So stick it.

The second essay was in class. That's where you pretend that writing is real easy for you. You pretend it flows out like a good case of diarrhea. I'm embarrassed to even tell you the topic. We had just read "University Days" by Thurber and now it was our turn. Dr. Bloe wrote on the board "High School Days." Then he said, "You have exactly fifty minutes and I expect a clear, well punctuated theme." I couldn't believe it. Thurber's essay was seven or eight pages long. I raised my hand and asked if ours were supposed to be as long as Thurber's. He gave me a confused look. Take an uptight intellectual: sincere-sounding sarcasm always throws a guy like that. He finally managed, "You should have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion." Great. He might as well have said, "You should have the Mona Lisa recreated by the

not an acceptable form of communication or vehicle for communication within the framework of this classroom. If you had spent more time on your topic and less time freewriting, you probably would have completed your body paragraph and conclusion. In the future I suggest you get right to it as it were." He said one other thing—"F."

The third essay was take-home and "grew" (his word) out of some things we were reading on teenage sex and courtship. The one I liked was a poem, "Cherrylog Road" by James Dickey. It's a poem about a teenage boy who meets his girlfriend Doris (what a great name) in a junkyard. His imagination goes wild while he waits for her. He imagines cars coming to life with black chauffeurs and rich ladies in them. The best line of the poem is this: "We left by separate doors/ Into the changed, other bodies/ of cars, she down Cherrylog Road/ And I to my motorcycle/ Parked like

Bernstein's

Folly

by James Sollisch

my schedule when I saw that lecturn go up. I thought, this must not be Composition if the guy plans to lecture formally. But he started lecturing, and he hasn't stopped yet. How are we supposed to get better at writing if we don't talk about our writing?

We've got this corny book too—*Structures of Prose* or something—where we read a great essay, you know "A Modest Proposal" by Jonathon Swift or "Shooting an Elephant" by George Orwell, and then they have this idea that we're ready to write our own essay using the same style as Swift or Orwell. Sometimes Dr. Bloe even asks for the same amount of words as the model essay has. That's another thing, how can a guy who has a Ph.D. in English from Princeton, or from anywhere for that matter, sit around all day counting words?

Now I may not be an expert on English, but I had a couple of great high school teachers. And they taught me a few things. My eleventh grade English teacher taught me to be as honest as possible. He got me alone after class one day and showed me my first paper. He asked me what I thought was good about it. I said some crap about the structure and the word choice (most of which had come from my new Thesaurus)

(Dr. Bloe calls them "themes"), let me give you some background on my other two essays. The first was supposed to be an observation/description paper. We read a few essays in *Structures of Prose*. One I liked was by John Updike called "Central Park." I sort of modeled mine after his (so you can see I was trying to go along with Dr. Bloe). I wrote about the way people act on elevators. I rode one up and down in the library for half an hour and took notes. I got a low C. As far as I can figure from his "hidden" message, the main problem was my fragments. He took off because I used so many of them. As if I don't know what a fragment is. Updike's whole essay is fragments. If we're going to do this modeling shit, can't we at least go all the way? I'll quote the comment for you that he wrote on my paper about fragments: "Your fragmentary style here does evoke Updike, but in subtle ways there are differences. Updike uses fragments as pointers which set off mood as much as they describe. The whole tone and timbre of his essay relies on his use of fragments. Do you achieve the same effect? Also, Updike has gained mastery over language use and therefore can manipulate the rules. A painter must first master realism before tackling abstraction." Hey Dr. Bloe, it

end of class time. Use only your pen and paper."

Take a guy like me: I couldn't even write about my dog in only fifty minutes. And I know most people think high school is boring and all, but I liked it. I could write a book about my high school days. I just didn't see how I could reduce it all to introduction, body, and conclusion. So I started freewriting just to get going.

I had a lot to say. I looked at the clock and thirty minutes was up. I knew I'd better pick some sort of focus and write a topic sentence. Profs like Dr. Bloe are very big on topic sentences. They really are. They act like they can't follow your thinking unless you knock them over the head with signs. Those guys are also big on transitions, whatever they are. His favorite comment is "weak transition." I must confess, I usually count on the teacher to put a little effort into reading. I figure if the guy has a Ph.D. he can handle little jumps from paragraph to paragraph.

I picked a very corny focus—the day we climbed the school clock tower at 3:00 in the morning and hung an effigy of the principal right in front of the clock face. I got through the introduction, and then time was up.

Here's what Dr. Bloe wrote on my paper: "Mr. Bernstein, freewriting is at best a personal activity. It is

the soul of the junkyard restored,/ a bicycle fleshed/ with power." The poem really made me think of all the pressure of having sex in high school, the strange places, the fear of being caught, the power of fantasy and imagination.

The assignment that Dr. Bloe thinks grew out of this was as follows: "Tell a story that involves high school dating or sexual experimentation. Make sure your theme shows some of the things we've been discussing this week from the literature. Try to use one of the pieces of literature as an influence. Maybe your story can show something similar to what one piece of literature shows. Length: 1500 words."

I have to give the guy credit. This could be a blockbuster assignment. A lot could be done with it. I decided the hell with Dr. Bloe and what I thought he wanted. By trying to do what he wanted so far, I hadn't helped my grade any. So I decided to go all out and write a really top notch story about a night I had with my ninth grade girlfriend, Miriam. I've biased you enough about Dr. Burton Bloe, so I'll just give you my essay to read, and you can draw your own conclusions. After you read it, I'll tell you what Dr. Bloe wrote about it.

MIRIAM

Miriam Weiner was round and wet and all woman—at fifteen she was definitely bursting out. We had been seeing each other for a few months in ninth grade. We had great times: after school we'd go beneath the stairwells and make-out before basketball practice. I spent half of every basketball practice trying to adjust my jockstrap. In the weeks before basketball practice began, we'd go back to her house or my house and hump and thump and make-out for hours. Of course our books were opened, pencils sharpened; we were prepared for the garage door to go up, and then it would be homework time. I was in her math class; my brains won over her mother who thought I was Miriam's tutor.

One night, late spring, she was sick. She had missed school because she had a sore throat. We were talking on the phone when her parents interrupted to say they were going out for a few hours. They told her no visitors, no math work either. As soon as they left, I was off and running. When I went over in the evening, I'd often wear sweats and bring my basketball. Then it looked like I was coming home from the playground and chanced to stop by to say hello to Miriam and her wonderful parents whom I so admired. So I ran towards my sick but still horny piece of bursting girlhood, spinning a basketball and thinking big.

We had been getting ready for the big move—from second and a half base—maybe it was third—to a full third and maybe even third and a half. It was an inevitable jump, and I thought this could be the night. Man that basketball hummed and twirled like a baton, like a dancer trapped in her pirouette, like a globe in a classroom full of eight year olds.

The house was mostly dark when I got there. Miriam came to the door in a Mickey Mouse t-shirt and underwear. The t-shirt just barely covered her underpants. I mean it clearly wasn't her father's shirt. You know how girls are always wearing their father's t-shirts, and the things are so big they might as well be wearing raincoats. I could really see old Lou Weiner in a Mickey Mouse t-shirt. Lou Weiner is about six feet two inches and quite a solid bastard—his stature always made me nervous.

We went into the den: she had the TV on, no sound, a bluish room. It was exciting and dark but light enough to see what we were doing.

"So how are you feeling? Are you really sick?" I asked. I figured it might be sort of immoral to go too far if she was really sick. Being sick might make her sort of vulnerable I thought.

"I don't feel too bad. I'll make it," she whispered, smiling as she led me to the big familiar couch. Man that was a great couch—the kind even old Lou could sprawl out on. Gigantic soft cushions and plenty of room for maneuvering. We lay

down and kissed a few times.

"I missed you in school today. Basketball practice was a drag without our warm-up drill." She laughed. I watched her throat vibrate—she had a lovely throat. She smelled great too. Some sort of lemon mist spray, no heavy perfume. Boy do I hate heavy perfume: I was with this girl once in eighth grade who had on a heavy perfume overdose; it smelled like lysol mixed with overripe cantaloupe. I was sneezing, and my eyes were watering. We could hardly even kiss. Miriam was too mature for that even at fifteen.

She started kissing my neck, little sucking kisses. That always drove me wild. I never had to do all the work with Miriam, and I liked that. Other guys had to do everything, and they acted like that was great. They never even got touched; I don't see why they bothered with it at all. And they were always the ones who bragged about how much they got.

I started moving my hand up her t-shirt. I had to start my ascent down by her underpants, but I didn't even try to play around there, not even a bit. I figured you had to be smooth about that—no jumping right to it. If you are over anxious with a girl, it gets them nervous. I found those beautiful ripe melons, and she started moaning softly.

Then while I was still kissing her (you should never stop kissing a girl when you want things to happen) and playing with her breasts, she began to rub my thighs. Real slowly, just up to my hips and back down—purposely missing the good part. It's a good thing I wore no jock under those sweats; I was already making a tent out of them. I started kissing her breasts. I didn't want her to ask me if I loved her and all, so I volunteered it during a break in the kissing. "I love you. I really do."

"I love you too." She said it through a sly smile and with her greenish cat eyes looking up at me. Then she turned me over so I was on my back, and she was on her side. She pulled up my t-shirt and started stroking my chest. I tried not to think about the few skimpy hairs that had been trying to grow there all year. She hinted that she wanted me to take my shirt off, so I did. Then she lifted her shirt to her shoulders, and resting it on top of her breasts, she lowered herself on me, chest to chest. Seeing those round breasts hanging there in the bluish light, I couldn't believe it. I'd seen them before but not hanging there looking down, sort of swaying when she breathed.

Her head fit just between my neck and shoulder, and she began to kiss my neck again. Then lower. She kissed her way to my nipples and didn't stop there. She'd never done that before. It sort of embarrassed me, (I thought that's not what she's supposed to do), but it felt good, so I just groaned and didn't say a word. She turned sideways, putting her hand on my chest, and I turned a little, putting my arms around her. I hoped my heart beat wasn't breaking her ear drums. Her hands were moving slowly from my nipples down to the elastic band of my sweats, just a finger or two under and back up. There was a deep blue silence, perfect except for this guy's voice struggling out of the T.V. and fighting with the off position of the volume knob. It sounded like Lorne Green and a bunch of dogs. "Your dogs will love Burger Train. Mine always come running when they know it's Burger Train time." And a bunch of dogs yelping and panting. I hoped Miriam didn't hear the dogs and think it was me. I hoped I

didn't sound that desperate, but I might have. "Yes sir, made with real chunks of beef. . . Yelp, yelp. . . your dogs will love it. . ."

When her fingers went down to the beginning of my pubic hair, I lost the voices. Then her hand stopped with four fingers just by the ridge of my hair. I had my eyes closed, and I swear I was praying that her hand would go further down. I was also sucking in, sort of trying to make her hand slip down further. I kissed the top of her head and pushed down with my kiss. (I hoped that this would be taken as encouragement.) Finally her hand moved down and slowly felt around. I let out all the air and probably sounded like a tire going flat. She touched me down there, and voices struggled out of that damn T.V. again. A man's voice. . . "Don't. . . please. . ." Her hand circled. "Please don't squeeze. . ." I prayed she didn't hear those words. She touched me harder. . . "Told you. . . don't squeeze. . ." She didn't listen. She squeezed and rubbed. The room started to move. . . "Squeeze the Charmin." Charmin. Charmin. Squeeze it, rub it. I was willing myself into Charmin, and she was fondling it like all the Whipple-abusers in the commercial. Squeeze, pull the Charmin, rub it. The room was spinning faster now, and a noise was whirring in my head, drowning out Mr. Whipple's final, futile pleas.

Then her hand shot out; she jumped off the couch. "Danny, the garage door—that's the garage door—get going—they'll kill me." Weak kneed, I struggled off the sprawling couch. I was trying to put on my shirt, and my head was stuck. Darkness and the noise again, a mechanical roaring—the garage door closing. And Miriam yelling, "Danny come on" and a hot liquid making a sticky spot on my sweats. I was reeling, thinking of old Lou and Mira coming through those doors any second. "Get my shoes." I ran, shirt still caught on my ears, past the door that led in from the garage, through the kitchen. Miriam threw my shoes from the den to the end of the kitchen, a perfect toss. "My basketball, I left my basketball."

"I'll hide it. Get out the back porch door." I heard the first car door slam. It's a good thing Mrs. Weiner was so fat. It took her hours to get out of the car. Old Lou always waited—he never went in first; he just wasn't that kind of guy. I got to the porch, shirt on, shoes in hand. It was dark. I struggled with the back door, listening to Mrs. Weiner struggle out of the car. The door—my door—was stuck. I kept pulling at it, but it was stuck at the top. I couldn't see anything. The second car door slammed—Mrs. Weiner was free. In a second they'd be in. I put my shoes between my legs and pulled the door until the part by the knob opened an inch or so. Then I stuck my fingers in for leverage. The door snapped tight. I almost screamed. The house door was opening; I heard old Lou bellowing "Mir-i-am we're home." I gave it everything, both hands; then I heard a crash which was blotted out by Mr. Weiner's bellowing. The door was free—too free—I was holding it in my hands. I set it aside, picked up my shoes and took off through the back yards running wildly, with a glazed smile, bruised fingertips, and a sticky crotch.

Here's the note Dr. Bloe wrote at the end of my

essay: "Mr. Bernstein, I am taken aback by the overly personal tone of your theme. There is some good writing here, but your colloquial tone and use of slang drags your theme down, as it were, below what is expected of college writing, especially the college writing of an Honors student.

To be sure, you show some things about teenage courtship, but you leave us to draw our own conclusions. Show and Tell. That's what college writing must do. You must use topic sentences and transitions. Your writing is void of even any attempt to conform to the conventions of college theme writing.

You are also relying too much on the use of 'you.' The first person personal pronoun is acceptable in personal narrative writing but not the second person pronoun, 'you.' This too drags down, as it were, the caliber of your prose.

I would like to see this rewritten with a clear use of topic sentences and transitions. And I want to see some clear conclusions drawn by you about teenage courtship."

So here's how I'd have to start my rewrite if I was going to rewrite this, which I'm not:

"Teenage dating is a very strange and confusing phenomenon. No one is really prepared for it, nor does anyone really know what to expect from it. This lack of preparation can lead to some very humorous moments. The funniest moment I had in my dating career occurred when I was in ninth grade. I tore the porch door off at my girlfriend's house while trying to escape from her parents, who had startled us by coming home too early."

Quite a catchy opening, huh? An impressive piece of COLLEGE THEME WRITING. I'm not the kind of guy who would die for a cause or anything, but sometimes you have to stand up for yourself. I would rather drop this class or get a low grade than debase my writing for Dr. Burton Bloe. I would have to throw up on myself if I rewrote this essay in topic-sentence-College-writing-a-la-Dr. Burton Bloe-style. I really would. So I decided I would go see Dr. Bloe and tell him what I thought.

Dr. Bloe was ready for me when I came. Actually he scared the hell out of me when I opened his office door after he yelled, "Come in, it's open." Dressed in sweat pants and a tank top undershirt, Dr. Bloe was in the middle of the room pumping two 50 pound dumbbells, one in each hand. At first I thought he was in training to kick my ass, which he could have done with no training at all. I remembered him coming to class in sweats a great deal, but I thought he was a jogger. He seemed to be too much of a neb to be anything else. But now it was apparent that he must be an ex-wrestler or something. One of those little wiry guys who pumps iron and deprives himself of fun. Don't those guys ever grow up?

To be honest, I wanted to turn and leave. Even run. I

felt like Woody Allen approaching a confrontation. Dr. Bloe grunted out in perfect rhythm, "I-will-be-with-you-in-a-min-ute-Mis-ter-Bern-stein." So while I waited for Dr. Bloe to do about twenty more reps, I started looking at all his books. What a mistake that was. First these guys get you nervous with this physical stuff, and then you look at a pile of scholarly books and that gets you from the other end. It looked like Dr. Bloe was into medieval literature from what I could make out. That figured, really. The Dark Ages, plagues, bloody massacres. Quite a cheery period. Just right for Dr. Bloe, the wrestling scholar. He probably spent his free time fantasizing about being a corny knight and rescuing hysterical damsels in distress.

"Can I help you with something?" Dr. Bloe asked while he added more weight to the dumbbells. I felt like I was in a sporting goods store, and he was the salesman (there was also a weight bench and an entire barbell set in the back corner).

"I'm not happy about my grades in your class, especially on the last essay."

"And what was your grade on the last theme?"

"You didn't grade it. You wrote a bunch of comments and said rewrite it."

"Oh yes." I waited for more. After a minute or so, Dr. Bloe started jumping rope. I couldn't believe it. He was quite good, actually. But I was beginning to get angry.

"Well what's your grievance?" he grunted out in rhythmic spasms.

"I want to know why my essay's not acceptable to be graded as it is."

"Didn't you read the comments on the back of your theme?"

"Of course I did—that's what I'm upset about. You said the writing was too personal. How could I write about teenage dating from a personal viewpoint and not be personal? You also said I showed too much. I thought that's what writers are supposed to do—show the reader things." I could feel the tears forming behind my eyes. I always get tears in my eyes during confrontations. When I was a kid, my grade school teachers always wrote on the comments section of my report card, "Danny is a very sensitive boy." I figured that just meant I got tears in my eyes a lot.

"If you are upset about the way I grade, you can take your grievance to the ombudsman, my dear friend Dr. Turner, in room 111."

"So, that's all you have to say?" No response, only the steady swish-tap, swish-tap of the rope on the hard tile.

"Well what I really wanted to tell you Dr. Bloe was that you're an asshole. And you don't know a fucking thing about writing. You may know a lot about the Dark Ages but not about writing." I started to leave.

"Just a minute Mr. Bernstein. Let me ask you a question." I stopped and began to lean against the bookcase to stop my knees from shaking.

"You think you're quite unique, don't you? Radically different from the average student, right? Well let

me tell you something. No one is unique. There is no place for uniqueness in this world—not in business, not in politics, and certainly not in academics. You will give up that cocky attitude of yours and learn to express yourself in a more conventional manner, or you will be very sorry. You may have a decent mind, but academia will do quite nicely without you. You are, Mr. Bernstein, a dime a dozen."

He was still talking and jumping rope. During his rhythmic soliloquy, I had begun to lean harder on the bookcase. At this point I pushed as hard as I could without showing any signs of exertion. I kept perfect eye contact with Dr. Bloe's bouncing eyes the whole time. Finally the bookcase went down. It fell in slow motion like in movies when buildings topple during earthquakes. Then there was a loud crash. Dr. Bloe stopped jumping rope. I smiled and said, "It's been nice talking to you, Dr. Bloe" and left.



James Sollisch teaches basic writing and supervises the peer tutor program at the University of Akron, has written several articles, and is currently working on a second novel. "Bernstein's Folly" is an excerpt from an unpublished novel, *Coming Up For Air*.

*Adjectives
consume
the
object*

**Todd
A.
Fry**

Todd A. Fry is a Wright State student.

No one suffers to speak of,
no hour is adorned with more purpose
than the last, no,
no heart beating overtakes or defines
the shape of the closing beat,
only the shape of a face
can warm the rhythm
can criss-cross the heart
into a corner

of a windmill
not in the past or present yet
passing and waiting to go
on one knee
with one outstretched hand

a ring on that hand
is symbolic of a motion
towards the river's door
where the air sucked in
is cool and chilling.

Lay down the scarlet
and peach tones,
place the tongue under the skull,
swallow
but hold out
the object
bridging
a water hole

where the distancing is feigned
the romance replaced
by compulsion and premature conclusion
and fear
of exposure.

I've stood here, right here,
and tapped my foot
and have helped you on with
your coat
and I have no real idea
why
I'm yammering like the rest
while something's aura
grows stronger, making me lightheaded
as I feel
the great rhythm surfacing

out of her face,
her face divides the formula
into parts
and opens a pathway
to the river's door,
another port flowing
into the great rhythm surfacing.



NEXUS

1984-85

PATRONS

Catherine L. Albanese

Jeanne Ballantine

WSU Campus Ministry

Ronald E. Fox, Ph.D.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Hager

Dr. Elizabeth Harden

Dr. Lillie P. Howard

James M. Hughes

Harun Inanli

Dr. Elenore Koch

Steven and Louise Mason

Desiree Nickell

Dottie and Gary Pacernick

Dr. and Mrs. J.B. Paperman

Joanne Risacher

Dr. Lewis K. Shupe

Dr. Willis Stoesz

Charles S. Taylor

Lawrence Turyn

A black and white photograph of a set of concrete stairs leading up to a building. The stairs are covered in a layer of snow. Ornate, dark-colored metal railings with decorative balusters and curved handrails run along both sides of the stairs. The building in the background has a brick facade on the left and a door with a decorative glass insert on the right. The glass insert has the words "ELEMENT" and "CO." visible. The number "52" is mounted on the wall to the left of the door. The scene is brightly lit, casting sharp shadows of the railings onto the snow.

1984-85